

Atomic

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by [Endlessly_Searching](#)

Summary

“I got something on my face or some shit?” Tommy bit out at Wilbur, cutting Philza off with little care. He’d be lucky to get beaten by him right in front of Sam because then they’d finally fucking leave.

For a second he expected Wilbur not to respond, but then his eyes widened like he realized what he’d been doing before it was back to a blank stare. “Your face is all fucked up.” He said simply.

“Wilbur.” Philza hissed, and Tommy could see from the corner of his eye as Techno rapidly brought the book back up to his face.

or,

Tommy is a notorious foster kid no one is sure what to do with. When Phil signs up to foster again, he wasn’t prepared for a kid to be dropped off on his doorstep so soon, one with that extensive of a record to his name. Techno and Wilbur do their best to be good (foster) brothers, but Tommy is a bit different than what they expected.

And Tommy just wants a break, but can't seem to catch one with the weird ass family he's being fostered by, and somewhere along the way begrudgingly starts to care.

Notes

I don’t know what im doing. Never written sbi, but just started reading it a day ago. I know there a lot of foster family ones but.... I needed a specific few scenes I couldn't be patient enough to find. So I'll just write it.

Pebbles

At fifteen years old, Tommy Innit knew he was sick in the head.

There was probably no one in the entire world who could start more fires than Tommy. The other kids liked to say he was a roach, the sight of him inflicted terror, he was quick on his feet, faster in his hiding, and absolutely no one could kill him. He used to cry when they'd call him that, pushing him around like they could control what little they had, so they could feel some semblance of power. Tommy Innit didn't cry about it anymore, no he didn't cry at all. Because he wore that name with pride. No motherfucker had been able to kill him, because he always bounced back.

House after house, he returned to the home no less volatile than before. Because no one could beat it out of him, no one could starve him out of it, he was a fucking *roach*. He was proud of it, he thought, but that didn't change the fact that no one kept a roach in their house.

And that's why he was here, watching raindrops race down his social workers window, listening to the soft lull of the radio cut in and out. When Sam had said this family would be a bit out of town, he didn't think he'd be watching signs turn into trees, and buildings turn to fields. They were a bit excluded Sam had said, it just happened to be that way. But Tommy knew why.

"I think you'll like it here." Sam said, finally parking at the top of the absurdly long driveway.

The quiet humming of the AC was gone as well as the radio, and only the sound of the rain on the roof of the car filled the air. Tommy couldn't sit still, there was a near constant itch of the pebbles in his sock, and he was shifting his feet to try and move them to no avail. Every part of this stuffy car ride had been sent from hell, and he wanted out. Tommy felt the urge to break the silence before he broke the window.

"Well, I reckon you'll be fired when they send me back." He responded, nose turning up in displeasure as he stared Sam down.

He didn't need Sam to baby him, he was a big man.

He watched as Sam's frown deepened, the man taking a deep breath and looking away from him. No one could ever hold his gaze head on, he figured it was just another one of his talents, so he tried to take it in stride. Tommy counted it as a win.

"Phil's a good guy," Sam said simply, staring out at the windshield at the house ahead.

"Yeah, well some people still say OJ simpson is a *good* guy, but the gloves motherfucking fit." The trashbag in his hand crinkled as his grip tightened over it, already hating every second of this.

Sam sighed, rubbing his head in his hands. "Tommy-"

“Can we just go in?” He snapped willing away the nerves that bit at him. “The faster we get in the sooner I can leave.”

Sam looked sad, Tommy hated it when Sam looked at him all sad. It pissed him off, there was nothing more infuriating.

“You know that’s not the purpose-”

Tommy kicked open the car door, the sound of muffled rain sharpening as he threw himself roughly out of it. Almost instantly he was soaked, the droplets bouncing off his trash bag, and probably soaking his backpack as well. The second he had stepped out there was a sharp pain in his foot, and he tried to ignore it. Stupid fucking rocks.

He fumbled around to slam the door shut, trudging his way up to the garage where the overhang of the gutters provided a little bit of shelter. He had to squint to see Sam’s looming frame emerge from the car, handheld up futilely to shield himself from the rain as he struggled to open an umbrella one handed.

Among literally everything else he was talented at, Tommy was really good at time travel. One minute he’d been standing under the gutter, and the next he was being ushered inside next to Sam. He’d been handed a hand towel by a man with a gentle smile, told to dry off as he helped Sam with his umbrella.

They stood in the threshold of the house, it was much warmer than the outside, filled with orange light, dim but not dark. The furniture looked as though some thought had been put into it, lots of wood pieces that looked old, stuff Tommy couldn’t be bothered to care about. Almost immediately he had spotted the silhouette of someone sitting on the couch further off, a book in their hands. He vaguely remembered Sam telling him there were already two kids, and Tommy’s stomach churned at the thought.

Teenagers, it never meant anything good.

There was the snap of Sam’s umbrella being closed, and he tried to focus back on whatever the man and Sam were talking about, but the sound of footsteps distracted him. His head snapped over to the side, to the sound of creaking steps and the thud of feet landing on wood, he stiffened.

Ah, there was the other.

He peeked out from over the banister, face blank as he stared at Tommy. Curly brown hair falling out of a beanie, a sweater far too big and fluffy taking up his lanky frame, Tommy immediately hated him. The house was too damn warm even in this weather to be wearing a sweater inside.

“I’m Philza.” Someone said far too close to him, and Tommy’s attention snapped back to the adults. The man stood next to him, attention drawn to him and Tommy took a step back.

He didn’t look that old, with blond hair tied behind his head, soft eyes, and a small smile, he exuded warmth. The image of the perfect foster father. Tommy almost scoffed at it, the ones

who started off nice pretending to be perfect were usually the meanest.

Tommy continued to stare at him, wanting to tell him to fuck off when his eyes lingered on his black eye too long. His lip curled as something hot fizzled into his stomach when Philza's gaze jumped away from the injury with something pitying in his eye.

Sam cleared his throat, "Well?"

Tommy gripped his trashbag tighter, feeling like he wanted to scream. "Tommy." He said bluntly.

Philza's smile widened before he gestured to the boy on the couch. "That's my son Technoblade, we call him Techno." Tommy glanced at him, disheartened when he realized the person on the couch looked a lot tougher than he before when he was just staring at his book. His punches looked like they would hit like a *truck*. The pink hair was definitely icing on the cake.

The idiot with the beanie finally stepped away from the stairs, coming into full view.

"Oh and that's my other son Wilbur," Philza said, something fond in his voice that had Tommy sick already.

Neither son said a word, but Tommy had at least gotten a nod from Techno, albeit it seemed a bit threatening with his cold stare. Though Wilbur seemed to have a staring problem, and it was really starting to piss Tommy off. He hadn't looked away since the second he saw him, and had not made a move to acknowledge him otherwise.

"How about-"

"I got something on my face or some shit." Tommy bit out at Wilbur, cutting Philza off with little care. He'd be lucky to get beaten by him right in front of Sam because then they'd finally fucking leave.

For a second he expected Wilbur not to respond, but then his eyes widened like he realized what he'd been doing before it was back to a blank stare. "Your face is all fucked up." He said simply.

"*Wilbur.*" Philza hissed, and Tommy could see from the corner of his eye as Techno rapidly brought the book back up to his face.

"Well." Sam clapped his hands together, reguinding the attention in the room. "This has been fun, but I should go." He gave Philza a little nod before holding up an arm like he wanted something from Tommy before quickly aborting it. "Call me if you need anything kid."

And then he was gone. Leaving Tommy in some weird ass place once again, he knew he'd see Sam again soon if this first impression was anything to judge.

"So Wilbur." Tommy watched as Philza sent Wilbur a sharp glance and he clutched his bag tighter. "Why don't you take Tommy and his things to his room?"

If Wilbur wanted to protest he didn't, he just shuffled his way over to Tommy, and annoyingly enough he was quite a bit taller. When he reached a long arm over to grab for Tommy's bag he moved it back, teeth clenching. "No thank you." He grit out.

Wilbur paused for a second to raise a brow and Tommy wondered if he was about to break his record of being kicked out from a home in ten minutes. But then Wilbur turned, gesturing rather theatrically to the stairs before he bound up them. Tommy shot one last glance to the two left before following.

He did his best to take note of which stairs creaked under his feet, noting not to step where Wilbur did as he seemed to be obnoxiously loud about it. When they reached the top of the steps Tommy scowled down at the clean little cartoon fish on Wilbur's socks, painfully aware of the pebbles still embedded in his own.

Wilbur seemed like he was going to say something about it before Tommy glared up at him. It was best to establish the pecking order in a home with other teens, and he'd be damned if he was going to be pushed around by a fluffy spring bean. Wilbur looked away.

"Your room is this way." He said guiding Tommy to the first door in the hall and opening it. "The bathroom is next door."

The room was nothing special, but Tommy was pleased to see that it was just his room and he wouldn't have to share. There was a full bed pushed into the corner, a wooden desk, a matching dresser and a lamp on the bedside that looked far too old for anyone to have kept. It was much more than he was certainly used to, but he was never one to complain. A bed was a bed, old-fashioned fancy posts or not. He took a few steps in, hesitantly setting his wet trash bag down in the middle of the room. He didn't care if he got the carpet wet, as he was sure it would dry quickly enough that Philza wouldn't notice.

For a moment they just stood there in thick silence. Tommy hated new places, which wasn't very convenient considering he was always in them. Whoever said you started tolerating things you hated after being exposed to them, was full of shit. He was certain exposure therapy was a myth, just sold to people for false comfort that they could change. The silence was broken predictably by Wilbur,

"Bet you can't tell which rooms are whose." he joked, probably trying to crack the ice as he getsured to the doors down the hall. The all had their names clearly printed on them, oddly enough it was carved into the wood. Wilbur's was carved a bit messily, like he'd been far too impatient to chip careful at it, instead opting to slice into the fine grain. His letters were various sizes, the W going from a decent size to the R turning much larger in the font. Techno's was done with a bit more precision, though his letters were not the prettiest, they stood neatly in a row. The grooves of the letters in his door were deeper and done with thought.

The worst thing though was Philza's door.

Carved haphazardly on his door, was not his name, It was a Frankenstein of different handwriting, clearly a collaboration of his two sons. Dad- written in bold letters, cut deep into

the wood, not an ounce of hesitation in any of the cuts, as there were no scratches. It had something like envy, hot and vicious flowing through him. Tommy was quick to look away.

Wilbur was staring expectantly at him like he was waiting for a response.

Tommy didn't laugh. Instead, he stared blankly at Wilbur. He could tell Philza had probably had a talk with him about being nice to whichever poor kid would arrive at their doorstep. Everything about him seemed fake, and off. He was just a bit too performative, and he knew that facade never stuck around for long. He was eager to see their true colors, it was just easier when things fell apart to be expecting it.

"You're really not funny." Tommy responded. "I don't see the point in fucking up your doors like that, why not use a sign?" He said rudely.

And he was right.

Wilbur was quick to stop smiling. Tommy knew the quickest way to piss someone off was insulting their stupid little sentimental shit. He didn't want to deal with any of their family bullshit, and he wasn't going to be easily forced into a lie. Before he could catch Wilbur's scowl he had turned around clearly ready to head out the door.

"Just come downstairs when you're done packing." He said, voice thick with restraint. But it didn't stop Tommy from catching the quiet "*Dick*." he muttered on the way out the door.

Something warm curled in his stomach, a sick sense of satisfaction he got whenever he correctly judged a situation. Sometimes it felt like he was playing a huge game of chess where no one else could see the board. That was one family member down, and two others to go. Quickly, he made work to stuff his trash bag in the back of the closet. Shucking off the ratty backpack he had and shoving it safely under it.

He would know if anyone touched his stuff. The tie of the bag was too tight and would have to be ripped to open, so it wouldn't be retied anytime soon. And he was keen on making sure the zippers of the backpack were always in the exact same spot when he closed it.

Aside from that, he knew house rules were probably coming next and he wasn't eager to wait anxiously for them. So once it was to his liking, he shut the closet door, scoffing at the dresser on the wall that he would never use.

He knew he wouldn't be staying here for the allotted four months.

Before he left to listen to whatever bullshit rules he'd probably heard a hundred times before -the ones he would most definitely break- he peeked through the blinds. His lips turned down at the bug screen in the window. Of fucking course it would have a fixed bug screen. It always made things harder, but he wondered if maybe Philza had done that on purpose.

From what Sam had said, Tommy knew his two sons weren't bio sons. Maybe one of them had given Philza shit, and so he thought he was prepared enough for fostering. But never had their been someone as good as annoying people as Tommy, there was no one who could handle him.

He'd worry about it all later though.

When he'd gotten downstairs it was to the displeasure of seeing the whole group sitting at the dining table. Philza shot him a smile and gestured to him to sit down, Wilbur shot him a quick glance, and Techno didn't pay him any mind. So far, the most tolerable had been Techno who didn't seem keen on interacting or playing pretend. Though his muscles and the unassuming power in his stature might prove otherwise.

Tommy walked up to the table, hands gripping the top of the chair Philza had pointed at. "I'd rather not sit." He said bluntly, watching closely for annoyance on Philza's face.

"That's alright." He assured, not a hint of any lie.

Tommy caught Wilbur roll his eyes and restrained his urge to kick him in the shin. Sure, Philza might be good at keeping his composure, but they never lasted for very long.

"Well Tommy, it's a pleasure to have you in our home."

It wouldn't be.

"I hope your stay here is nice, but there are a few rules we have."

Called it. Tommy thought, he was an expert on foster homes at this point, some would even call him a professional.

"Weekends we don't have a curfew." Tommy perked up, admittedly that was a rule he had not been expecting. "But on weekdays I prefer to have the house quiet by twelve in case anyone is sleeping. And if you're not sleeping over at someone's place, you should be at home around 12 because it gets dangerous outside. If you're going out let me know where and when you'll be back. You share a bathroom with your foster brothers, so try and keep things clean, and at least have your room habitable. Oh and our main thing in this house is respect." Phil paused, the friendly smile on his face not yet leaving.

Tommy's heart sunk and he did his best to keep indifferent. The grip he had on the chair tightened, and he knew his knuckles must be white under the scabs at this point. It was all good until that, because of course, respect your "parent" or face consequences. And Tommy was well acquainted with the various creative consequences people could come up with.

Philza ever oblivious to Tommy's thoughts continued. "By that I mean, I expect you all to respect each other. So respect each other's space, belongings, and feelings. I prefer to take the approach of talking things out if you ever have any problems."

Well, that certainly hadn't been what he'd expected, but maybe Philza was playing the long con. He wanted to feel like he was a good parent, so when he inevitably hurt him, it would be hidden under how nice he sounded. Tommy had seen that kind before.

Though was going to puke. It didn't have to sound so fucking cheesy.

Like talking things out ever solved anything, oh how many wars had been solved from talking things out? Oh, wait? None? That's fucking right.

“Do you have any questions?” Philza finished.

The iron grip Tommy had on the chair started to let up, he was eager to get this over with. Longing for the second he could be alone and take out the stupid rocks prodding in the soles of his feet. He was generally an angry person, but he felt his temper wearing unusually thin with the added annoyance.

“No.” He was quick to say, bouncing a little on the balls of his feet to relieve the pain. “Can we be done now.” He said, not much of a question in his tone.

Philza seemed unbothered. “Yep, if you need anything let me know. I’m going to make dinner in a bit and I’ll send one of ‘em up to grab you.” He got up from his seat to stand, and Tommy was all the more uncomfortable being in the room. “You just focus on settling in, if you don’t feel up to having dinner with us, I’ll just send the food up to you.”

Unusual, Tommy thought, but again Philza seemed to want to play the caring parent. He wanted to spit in his face.

“Whatever,” Tommy said, wasting no time in turning around and springing up the stairs. Testing the pattern he’d come up with to make the least amount of noise. When he got to the top of the staircase with only one creak, he felt his chest swell with pride.

Yeah, he got this.

—

The stubborn fucking rocks wouldn’t come out, and Tommy didn’t have another pair of fucking socks. So he was stuck with the microscopic little bitches stabbing him every time he walked.

But,

Dinner went off with little fanfare. Tommy decided to in fact eat it down there but made a note to eat up in his room otherwise. See the first day was important to scout out routines and where everything was. When he came down, he made sure to watch as Techno opened the cabinets to set the table. He figured the other ones had to be for kitchen tools -which could double as weapons- and food -which he would be stealing-.

It was uncomfortable sitting at the table, especially when Techno and Wilbur took their places. It was only a six-seat dining table which meant they were pretty close, and of course they would sit near each other. It was like being a fly on the wall, staring into a family home and seeing a dynamic he’d never be a part of. Lasagna was at the table and the others were quick to pass stuff around with a sense of ease and familiarity Tommy had never experienced. It fucking blowed.

Eating around people made Tommy sick. He didn’t like when they stared, when they got too close to his plate, and especially when they reached for his food. This was no different, and for a second he pondered just saying he was sick as he got what he wanted from this, but he wasn’t going to ever deny a hot meal.

He was quick to dig in, not taking much time to enjoy it, though he had to admit it was pretty damn good. Techno and Wilbur, or rather just Wilbur seemed to be having a conversation. He could tell his presence there made things more stilted and it only made him more eager to finish.

Halfway through the meal, where he was sure to keep his mouth stuffed in case conversation ever drifted to him, things went awry. Philza had just placed his napkin down, infuriating smile directed straight at Tommy who was caught mid-bite.

He froze for a brief moment, fork halfway to his mouth before quickly shoving it in.

“So, Tommy, what do you think of your room?”

It was an inconspicuous question, but he could read between the lines, he wasn't a noob. Philza was searching for gratefulness, the reward, and fawning over him being a decent fucking human being. If Tommy didn't give that to him, there would be consequences. Which left him at an unfortunate crossroads.

There were tiny rocks in his feet and no matter where he shifted they were present.

He could give Philza what he wanted, not rock the boat, or he could do what he always did and start a fire.

But the pain in his feet remained.

“It's fine.” He answered, before shoveling more food in his mouth. Willing the conversation to be over.

“Alright, I was thinking we'd go shopping tomorrow to get stuff to make you more comfortable here. As well as get you some school supplies for Monday. How's that sound?”

He sure as hell wasn't going to say thank you, but he wasn't in the mood for an altercation. “It's fine.” He repeated.

Philza seemed content with his answers and finally let him off the hook. Turning his focus instead to Wilbur.

“Wil, why don't you come with?” He asked.

Wilbur who had been enjoying his rather one-sided conversation with his brother stopped, shooting the quickest of glances to Tommy. He knew he wasn't fond of him, which was just fine with Tommy because he didn't like him one bit either.

“Uh no, actually I have an assignment due tomorrow night.” He said a sheepish smile on his face. It was most definitely a lie, Tommy was glad Wilbur seemed to be the avoidant type instead of the reactive type. Although, he had to admit it was a bit boring.

Philza nodded not seeming to pick up on the tension in the air and then turned his attention to Techno. He didn't even have to ask anything before Techno responded,

“Same.” He said indifferently, and Tommy was envious of his ability to be unbothered. He went right back to his meal, not a care in the world.

Tommy waited for the yelling, the demands, maybe even a fist to be raised, but nothing happened. Philza took their answers in stride, not a hint of annoyance. Maybe this would be easier than Tommy thought, Philza seemed like a little bitch, and Tommy would take advantage of that. It was only a matter of time before things went atomic, and Philza would lose it and Tommy would be away from this shithole.

“Well, that settles it. It’ll be just us tomorrow.”

Fucking fantastic.

Okay so maybe, Tommy was not right about everything. But it’s okay, he was a big man quick on his feet, being surprised never lasted long. He’d had the rug pulled from underneath him many times, and one little thing wasn’t going to bring him down. Philza might be a bit tougher to understand than most. But Tommy tried to pick out things that would tip him off to Philza being a shithole, so as they shopped he paid close attention.

It went... Unexpectedly.

Philza bumped his cart into another person’s, he apologized and that was it. Tommy accidentally grabbed the wrong milk, Philza just told him to go back, no yelling and no screaming. Philza bought Tommy clothes, it wasn’t willingly of course, but he’d been insistent. Tommy was getting annoyed with all Philza’s questions about what he wanted, and he didn’t take nothing as an answer.

So, begrudgingly he picked a few shirts, some jeans, and new socks. With every item added to the cart he felt the strength of the storm to come build. His debt to Philza was only growing and he hated owing people. When they got to checking out, Tommy paled at the price and felt his nerves start to flair.

The thing about foster homes or people, in general, is that nothing is free, there is always something expected in return.

But the worst was yet to come,

When shopping had finished, and he had helped Philza bring the groceries in -hoping to lessen some of his debt and get on Philza’s good side-, He also paid close attention to where all the food was packed away. It all came to a head.

Just as he was about to climb the stairs to safety, where he’d probably sit in his room and pull out a book, Philza called out to him.

“Tommy mate?” He asked, and Tommy felt himself deflate. He was so fucking close to freedom.

He paused, hand glued to the banister. This was probably where he got scolded for doing something wrong, or where Philza expected something in return. It was probably gonna be something stupid he fucked up that Philza would use to take his anger out. Not great, but Tommy was a big man and he could handle it.

“Yeah?” He asked turning around to walk slowly down the steps.

Philza stopped in front of him, an arms-length away. “Thank you for helping me shop.” Tommy gulped, hands suddenly clammy and stomach twisting. “I got this for you, when we found out we’d be fostering you.”

He held out a box, and Tommy’s stomach plummeted.

“Sam said you didn’t have a phone. Since you’re going to be staying here a while-”

A while.

“I got you one. It’s nothing special but, you’re on our plan so you should be able to contact me when you’re at school, or contact Wilbur and Techno. Its set up with our numbers already.”

Tommy stared down at it, the best phone he’d ever had was one of those stupid prepaid ones. It was a flip phone that he’d bought with what little money he’d stolen. The minutes never ran out, because it’s not like he had anyone to call. But it had felt nice, having something that every other kid had. Sometimes he would dial random numbers just to see if anyone would be on the other side. Admittedly it felt nice being able to call 911 if needed.

That phone was smashed four foster homes ago.

Tommy didn’t like the implications of this. Best, he was being given this phone for Philza to smash later. Grow attached and have it taken away, that’s how shit worked. Worst, he was going to owe Philza something big. And even worse than worse, Philza had high hopes for his stay, and genuinely expected Tommy to be a good kid who would stay the full four months.

He didn’t even want to think about that option. The look on Philza face when he realized Tommy would be too much to handle. The feeling of stepping into the car to be taken back to the home. The heartbreak of a decent home telling him he was being sent back. Living up to the title he’d been given so long ago, a roach.

“No- I don’t need that,” Tommy said, making no move to grab at the box.

“Cmon mate, it’s for you,” Philza said shrugging and pushing it forward a little bit.

Tommy couldn’t do this anymore. The rocks had rubbed his feet raw, and he was probably bleeding. He was done playing nice, done with Philza playing pretend, and he just wanted something normal, something familiar.

So, he lit a match.

“I said, I don’t fucking want it,” He snapped, fingers curling into a fist, and grip digging into the wood of the banister.

Philza seemed to blink in surprise before a chuckle left his lips. “Kid, I think you’re overthinking this. You can just take the phone.”

He wanted Philza to scream, he wanted his match to take and for this to explode. To feel the familiar heat of a fire he started, to have the control of watching it burn. He didn’t want to get his hopes up, and he didn’t want to leave with more pebbles in his socks. It’s not that he wanted Philza to be a shit guy, but he knew the chances were unlikely to none that it would work out.

He was just so fucking tired, and maybe if he had come to this home another time he’d be trying, but right now with the pain in his feet, and the dull throb in his eye, he felt like self-destructing.

So, Tommy’s upper lip pulled back and he sized Philza up, meeting him straight in the eyes with as much courage he could manage. He was done holding shit in, he wouldn’t be scared.

“What do you want for it huh?” He spat finally standing up straighter. “A fucking medal? Who gives a foster kid, a fucking smartphone. I’m not stupid.”

And there it was, the spark that would catch, the words he would always regret, but it was inevitable.

But it didn’t light, and Philza just sighed. No part of his body language was threatening, there was no sign of attack, anger, or fear. In fact, he looked like he had been expecting it, and wasn’t *that* confusing. But worst of all he didn’t look away from Tommy.

“Well, I want you to call me and let me know when you’re getting home and when you’re out. And if you need anything, reach out to me or your foster brothers.” He hummed, both hands palm up in a placating manner. “That’s what I want.” He said pushing the phone gently into Tommy’s hand.

The anger and the fear left, and Tommy stood staring disbelievably at Philza. That had not been what he was expecting at all, and now he just stood awkwardly unsure of what to do. Finally when he realized Philza was making no move to leave he huffed.

“Fine!” He said, grabbing the phone and yanking it rather softly away from Philza. “Your loss man.” He said, turning around. “You’re fucking weird.” He murmured, ignoring the laugh he got in response.

On the way up the stairs, he skipped every other step, eager to get away from whatever the hell that had been.

“See you for dinner!” Philza called out from behind him.

Tommy just shut his door.

Just when he thought things couldn't get any weirder, it was 2am.

And shit always happened at 2am. He couldn't sleep, that wasn't too unexpected but this night had been particularly unbearable. The phone being charged was a constant presence on his bedside, taunting him to remember the situation earlier. It was somewhat nice here, if he was a naive kid he could pretend like this would all turn out, but he wasn't. It was just fantasy.

But that wasn't the problem, no the problem was he fell asleep. With his feet burning, he wrapped up in the various blankets Philza had given him, the hum of the AC, and the white noise of the fan, he was lulled into security. For the first time in three days, he'd fallen fully asleep.

Tommy hated sleep because in sleep, you couldn't avoid what you'd been running from during the day.

—

Insistent screaming, so loud it was near incomprehensible. He could remember the pain dulling in his bleeding fists, the taste of something sour on his tongue. The shattering of glass tipping the precarious balance and the precursor to the shattering of bones. Tommy was a lit match in a house shrouded in gasoline so potent it stung his eyes. It was blurry, maybe from smoke, maybe from tears. The memory was sand between his fingers, slipping further and further away when he grabbed at it. He always left with something. The grit of the road rubbing his feet raw, the burning of hot tar despite how quick he was sprinting...More screaming echoed in his head, him running faster. Pebbles and rocks pushed so far into his feet with the urgency of escaping, every step towards freedom punished with pain, leaving a pathway of blood in his wake.

The red and blue, headlights bright in his eyes, a warning of vulnerability, he ran faster. Terror, sick and twisting, horror, screaming echoing in his head. The cuffs bit cold into his skin. Eyes watching him harsher than fire, hands grabbing him, restricting snakes.

At fifteen years old he sat behind looming bars, the lingering smoke stuck in his lungs. His belongings taken from him, eyes sharp and tongue lashing when he was found. There was nothing else left he thought, nothing but the wake of destruction he had left,

And the pebbles stuck in his feet.

He woke up shaking, gut-churning and bile on his tongue. The blankets which had been comfortable were now hands holding him down. The white noise of the fan was drowned out by the screaming in his head. Breathing was so much harder with his ribs crying out, and his black eye hurting. But the thing that drew his attention was the burning in his feet. The prick of rocks and shards of glass, the phantom pain of that day at his last foster home.

He was out of bed before he knew it, ripping his socks off, uncaring of the sounds he was making. He stumbled, breathing heavy, pushing open his door and darting into the bathroom. His head was foggy, and he was willing his time travel to start, but he wasn't in a place where he could choose to not be present.

He was losing his grip on what little he had, but the hot fire in his soles was something he needed to put out.

He threw himself in the bath, reaching for whatever towel had been on the rack and starting the water.

He had to get the rocks out.

He needed them out of his feet.

He put his feet into the frozen water and wasted no time scrubbing, hoping to find a semblance of relief. He thought he'd gotten them out, he was sure he'd gotten them out. He scrubbed harder. Were they in the scabs? Had he missed some glass? Maybe they were microscopic. He scrubbed and scrubbed, and watched as dirt and grime went down the drain.

His breathing grew frantic. The rocks were still there, he could feel them press in further. Why wouldn't they leave, why did he still feel-

"Tommy?"

He froze, heart thudding in his chest as he turned to face Philza who was standing at the door, a look of concern on his face. He didn't know what to do, he was scared. A deer caught in headlights.

Philza took one look at him, and then crouched down a little to appear less threatening. "What's going on?" He asked softly, placing the coffee cup that had been in his hand down on the floor.

There was a lump in Tommy's throat that he had to fight, struggling to take in a breath so he could talk. Every minute he spent not scrubbing the more it burned.

"There's pebbles in my feet and I can't get them out." He rushed, willing himself to calm down. He sounded fucking insane, and he knew he looked it too, but it didn't matter when he couldn't stop the burning.

Philza seemed to take a moment, eyeing Tommy's bloody feet in the bath. "Alright." He said taking a deep breath. "Why don't you let me take a look?"

Tommy wanted to refuse, he did. He could take care of himself, but all he wanted was some relief. And so he caved and nodded. Watching carefully as Philza shuffled over, coming to sit on the ground next to the tub.

Philza held out a hand and Tommy shifted, putting his back against the wall on the side of the tub to stick his foot out. When Philza reached out he flinched, but quickly tried to calm himself. His touch was feather-light at his heel, and he watched as he scrutinized the wounds.

"I know you can't see them, but they- they're there. They have to be- I can still fucking feel them." He rambled.

“Alright,” Philza said calmly. “These look pretty bad, I’ll clean them and wrap them up for you okay kid?”

“Okay.” Tommy agreed quietly.

Philza reached over to the cabinet, shuffling around in there and pulling out a first aid kit. “Good thing we keep these in every bathroom huh?” He said quietly, and Tommy nodded wordlessly. He watched as Philza opened it up, pulling out some disinfectant and tweezers. “Okay, Tommy could you do me a favor and try and take some deep breaths.”

“I dont- I don't need to take stupid fucking deep breaths.” Tommy hissed. “I just need these fucking pebbles out of my feet.” His head fell back against the tiled wall with a thud, about ready to scream in frustration.

“Really kid?” Philza took two fingers, pressing in just above Tommy’s ankle. He stared down at his wristwatch.

“The fuck are you doing?” Tommy asked, wanting to pull away but too scared too.

Philza didn't answer, just shook his head. So Tommy waited, the bathroom filled only with the sounds of his fast breathing and the tap dripping.

“Your pulse is 130, you definitely should take some deep breaths.” He said, finally pulling away. He ripped open the package of disinfectant and began wiping at the wounds.

“How the fuck- How did you get a pulse from my ankle?” Tommy asked, hands twisted in his pants as he tried to ignore the feeling of touch.

“It’s your posterior tibial artery,” Philza said finishing his cleaning. “I’m going to poke around your foot and see if you have anything lodged in there, is that okay?”

“Yeah whatever,” Tommy mumbled, eyes closed as he was trying to focus on the feeling of air filling his lungs and slowing the pounding of his heart.

“You’re doing good, kid.” Philza soothed, the feeling a the cold tweezer digging into his foot startling Tommy.

“Shut up old man.” Tommy hissed. “What the fuck is a postibial artery, and how do you know that.”

Philza laughed, and the cold of the tweezers was gone. “I’m going to wrap your foot now, does it feel better?”

Tommy paused his train of thought, focus going back to his foot where the burning had suddenly disappeared. “Yeah.” He said quietly, a bit confused.

“Alright, good. And I’m a doctor.”

Tommy barked out a pitiful laugh, opening his eyes to stare at the man he’d met just a day ago, wrapping his foot carefully like he was something to be cared for. “You’re kidding.” He

muttered.

Philza just finished wrapping the foot in gauze, it was snug but not restricting. “Nope.” He said smiling down at Tommy.

“I hate every fucking moment of this.” Tommy said bluntly, going back to lean his head against the wall.

“I figured.”

Philza worked in silence for a while, checking in with Tommy to tell him what he was doing. Tommy continued to focus on his breathing, trying to ignore the feeling of being touched, his only association with it ever being bad. Eventually, he calmed down, time seeming to go back to normal and his head clearing just a bit.

The hands left his skin.

“Tommy.”

“Hm?” Tommy hummed, not bothering to open his eyes.

“You don’t have pebbles in your feet anymore.” Philza said simply, like it was just a matter of fact.

Tommy’s eyes opened and he met Philza’s gaze head-on. In the quiet light of the bathroom he could see Philza’s hair had fallen from its tie. It was splayed around his head, probably from sleep. There were bags under his eyes, and the coffee remained at the entrance of the room. He could see Philza’s mouth move as he spoke.

“You’re okay.” He said, mouth forming around the words like he’d said them a million times before. “I promise.” He gestured to the wrappings on Tommy’s feet. “It’s over.”

For just tonight, Tommy allowed himself to hope so.

Public Bathroom

Chapter Notes

Woah I've updated and in such a short time! But I really wanted to get this out, everything went wrong while I was finishing it. It would've been out a day sooner had I not been literally shit on :)

Like yk those iconic author notes? Mine would be like,

Sorry for not updating guys! I was in the middle of editing and had to instead sit in a shower fully clothed to get the cat shit off of me. Oh and I'm kind of homeless and don't have wif LMFAO. So thank you to the kind woman letting me stay somewhere with a bed <3 She's saving my life fr fr

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

If Tommy thought Philza was weird, then he didn't know what to call his sons, because they sure were something. Techno didn't seem much of a talker, which was fine with Tommy who really didn't want to involve himself in the family. But on the weekend he'd spent at the house he noticed a few weird things about the dude. One night, when it was far too hot to exist or even sleep, Tommy decided to take measures into his own hands.

He padded quietly down the wooden stairs, precision and care in every step he took. When he reached the bottom he released a breath, he hadn't made much noise at all which had been his goal. He stuck to walking on the balls of his wrapped feet, creeping his way through the living room and into the kitchen using the same tactic.

He froze when he saw the small light coming from the cracked fridge, but it had been too late. Having been too focused in not making a sound that he hadn't looked up in time to realize the kitchen was already occupied.

Techno turned around, droopy eyes lay underneath his shitty glasses, face as blank as when they first met. Any lesser man may think that due to the lack of reaction, they hadn't been spotted, but even in the dark quiet of the 2am air, Tommy knew that Techno was far too observant to have missed him. So, he used his go-to tactic, turning the tables.

"What are *you* doing here?!" He asked, practically whisper shouting across the room. He felt entirely too defensive for his comfort. His palms were starting to sweat, because Techno hadn't taken his stupid eyes away from him. He didn't know if he was about to be tattled on, or if Techno was going to take him out himself, but he preferred none of the above.

There was an unbearable amount of silence that had Tommy questioning if he had even spoken, before Techno finally responded,

“Hydrating.” Was all he said, voice gruff like someone who had just woken up.

And if the monosyllabic response hadn’t been enough, the icing on the cake was Techno lifting his hand out of the fridge to show Tommy perhaps the LARGEST fucking water bottle he’d ever seen in his life. It was bigger than his fucking face, and probably about as long as his arm.

What kind of freak had a water bottle so damn big?

Now, Tommy had heard about the fight or flight bullshit, and he’d been privy to the reaction quite a bit. Never in his fifteen years, with his grizzled experiences and tough resilience did he think that it would be triggered by a water bottle.

But it was.

Entirely unnerved by the stare off and the stupid ass waterbottle which glinted at him threateningly in the fridge light, he had made his decision. This was way too much especially for 2am on a Sunday night, he turned around and left the kitchen. Thoughts of stealing some non-perishables completely forgotten, and a new found fear of the family he was staying with gained.

But of course, it wouldn’t have stuck with him so much if it had just ended there. If there was one thing to learn about Techno, it was that it never just ended there.

That morning when he woke up to the sun peaking through his heavy curtains -right in his fucking eyes mind you- he was probably the grumpiest he had been since the incident in foster home six. The one with the obnoxious little ankle-biters. He was starting school today, and he knew it was going to be rough. He was starting mid year, when everyone already knew each other and attention on him and his fucking black eye would be at an all-time high.

Tommy did not like attention at school, or in general. It put a target on his back, and people loved to fucking judge.

Suffice to say he was not happy, he was tempted to stay curled up under the blankets, but the pressure of the wrappings on his feet pushed him forward. They shared a bathroom and Philza had said he’d be catching a ride to school with the brothers, so that left him a small portion of the morning to himself.

He got out of bed, feeling like an old fucker with achy joints and barely cracked eyes. As he made his way to the bathroom and swung his door open, there was the distinct clunk of something metal falling on the floor that had him jumping out of his skin.

There, pushed away from the door and rolling pitifully on the ground, was an absurdly large water bottle, the color of a mushroom cloud. Hesitantly he leaned closer, seeing the bit of paper poking from underneath it. Gently, like it was a bomb, he nudged it with his foot, turning it around.

A green sticky note was stuck to it, scrawled in the same handwriting on the door just down the hallway, with the singular word,

‘hydrate.’

It was written in glitter pen of all things, one glittery word that was somehow more ominous than anything Tommy had ever seen. He wasn’t sure what he was supposed to do, was Techno going to beat him up if he didn’t use it? Or was this just some stupid thing to fuck with him.

Wilbur’s door opened, and a bolt of lightning went through Tommy. Quicker than anything he had done so early in the morning before, he was grabbing the water bottle and shutting his door behind him, curses just hanging off his tongue.

This was going to be a shit day.

—

Philza said since Wilbur was in the community college just down the way of the high school, they would carpool and he’d drop Techno and him off everyday, as well as pick them up. Tommy wasn’t too fond of this idea, but since they were far out of the way of town there were no buses that would be stopping near the house.

He’d just have to cope.

And cope he did,

Not only was he confined in Wilbur’s busted honda civic with two people he did not want to be in the car with, but the AC was fucking broken. He sat with his head stuck far out the window, hoping for some reprise from the stuffy car that was heating very quickly in the early sun. With sweat causing the hair to cling to his forehead, and the seatbelt digging into his torso with how far he was stuck out, he felt like a fucking dog.

Wilbur had his music turned up loud to hear over the sound of the wind whipping in the open windows, and he hummed along seeming far to chipper for 6am. Techno sat in the passenger seat, his window open a crack as he was flipping pages of a book Tommy hadn’t seen in his hands before -he read a lot- Every time Wilbur took a turn, he’d reach up from his book to grab what Tommy liked to call the “Oh shit handles” or perhaps a better name was the “pussy bitch handles.”

But with Wilbur’s driving, which nearly had Tommy jerk completely out the window on the fastest turn he’d ever experienced, they should be called the “Oh fuck we’re going to die” handles. At this rate he was sooner to die from the hands of Wilbur’s reckless driving than escape the hellhole of this foster home.

Somehow they made it there alive, tires practically squealing into the parking lot of the school. Tommy wasted no time yanking the door handle, scrabbling to grab his backpack and haul ass.

The door wouldn't open.

He got more desperate with yanking the handle until he realized no one in the car had made a move. His eyes shot up to the front confused, meeting the gaze of none other than Wilbur in the rearview.

Wilbur, who had probably the most maniacal smile he'd ever seen a real person have.

Tommy's throat went dry, as he realized this was probably his payback for what he'd said when they first met. Without the supervision of Philza who knew what Wilbur would do.

Oh fuck, maybe Wilbur wasn't a pussy, and would actually kick his ass.

"See you here by three okay Tommy?" He said cheerily, far too many of his teeth on display.

"Wil turn the child locks off." Techno said with a sigh, hand gripped onto his own door handle.

Tommy gulped, looking away from Wilbur and to the sweet, sweet, freedom of the school parking lot just out the window. "Yep, three. Got it." He fiddled with the door handle some more.

"Have a nice day at school!" Wilbur chimed as the click of the car signaled the doors being unlocked.

Within a millisecond of the sound Tommy had ripped the car door open, stumbling out and not even looking back when he called Wilbur a "Fucking psycho."

Wilbur just laughed before his music was turned back up to full volume and he was out of the parking lot faster than a rocket. Tommy stood, clutching his backpack and the tin of the cold water bottle, trying to catch his breath. He remembered the night in the tub with Philza, and how deep breaths had genuinely helped, and he did his best to employ them.

He definitely just got fucking hazed.

His eyes met Techno who was still standing in the parking lot with him for some godforsaken reason. When their gazes met, Techno just pointed down at the water bottle in Tommy's clammy grasp and gave a curt nod.

"Office is just through the front doors." He paused and seemed to mull over his words.

"Don't die." Which was oh so comforting, and then he walked away, book tucked under his arm.

"What the fuck." He muttered to himself,

First day at this new school, with this fuckass foster family, and Tommy was already stressed.

Techno had been right about the location of the office, so at least he hadn't been lying. Tommy had gotten his schedule and meandered his way around the school, the weight of the

stupid water bottle starting to make his arm ache. It took him a shit amount of time to find his first class, but luckily they had arrived at the school early anyway.

The teacher barely glanced up when he entered, pointing at a seat and then looking back down at whatever bullshit papers he was looking at before.

What a warm welcome, he thought, pulling out his red pencil bag - the one Philza insisted he needed- and choosing one of his notebooks. Math was definitely a red notebook subject he thought, it just seemed to make sense,

He spent his time doodling on the margins of the pages, trying to pay no mind to the room filling up with loud students around him. Most of them were staring, some taking a good look at his face, which made Tommy want to hunch further into himself.

You'd think when the bell rang, and class had started they'd have the decency to look away, but they didn't. Rationally he knew that probably most students weren't whispering about him, but a few had to be with the huge ass shiner on his eye and the busted knuckles. He wasn't exactly the picture of a good kid, and small towns like this always needed something to gossip about.

He clicked the top of the pen he held, worrying his lip as he shrunk further under the feeling of stares. The metal pen kept slipping from his sweaty grasp and it was starting to piss him off, he couldn't get the pattern of the clicks right with having to constantly adjust his grip. There was some shuffling from the back of the room, a laugh that Tommy felt like he caused and his stomach churned. Was he breathing too loud? Had he done something to piss a fucker off already? What was he-

"Hey." Someone whispered, and Tommy's attention shot over to the kid sitting right next to him.

He had hair that seemed to get in the way of his eyes, but Tommy could somewhat make out the brown eyes peeking underneath it, the ones staring right into him. He stopped clicking his pen.

"Could I borrow a pen?" He asked, a small smile on his face.

Tommy could practically smell the scent of gasoline filling the air of the room, but he remembered the gentle hands wrapping gauze around his feet, the feeling of the rocks being pulled, the blood being washed. He eyed his pencil bag before looking back at his classmate who seemed as genuine as any fucker could possibly be.

"Didn't you fucking bring your own?" He asked, aiming for lighthearted but his tenseness poisoned his tone, and made it sound more aggressive than intended.

Shit, come on he was trying.

The kid just laughed a little, shaking his head and disrupting the shaggy hair that had been in his eyes. He could probably see fucking worse now. "I never bring anything. Pinky promise I'll give it back." He quipped, pinkie reaching out from his desk and held out to Tommy.

His nose scrunched in distaste. “What are we fucking five?”

The kid glanced pointedly back at the people who had been staring, the ones who’d been laughing earlier before turning his attention back to Tommy. “Might as well be.” He said, sounding displeased.

Tommy felt something in him relax, and he looked away. “Fine.” He caved, reaching into his pencil bag and pulling out the second nicest pen he had. It wasn’t no bic that’s for sure, and the ink was dark and he knew it would run smooth.

He quickly wiped his palm on his jeans before he hooked his pinkie around the kid’s, something twisted uncomfortably in his stomach at the contact so he was quick to pull away. But for some reason he found the smile he got in return nice, so he gave a hesitant one back.

He held out the pen, and the kid took it, smiling only brighter and clicked the top of it. “Thanks.” He said, sounding genuinely pleased.

“Yeah well-”

“Stop talking.” He was cut off, the sharp voice of the teacher slicing through the small bit of nice atmosphere he’d had since the morning.

His head snapped to look at the Teacher who had moved from his desk, the one who now stood at full height at the front with the nastiest glare directed right at him. The room seemed to get hotter and Tommy wondered if their AC was as faulty as Wilbur’s.

He cleared his throat, he was too hot. “I was just-”

The teacher rolled his eyes and Tommy’s throat went dry, he seemed genuinely angry. “I know you’re new here.” He spat, taking a few steps closer to Tommy. It was like the whole room went quiet and zeroed in on him, and his heart burned in his chest. Sparks of fear shot pinpricks down his body, more building every time the teacher took a step closer with that nasty glare. “But, we have strict policies.” He stopped just a few feet away, and Tommy knew at this point everyone was looking at him. The sparks grew bigger, “If you can’t behave-”

He did his best to lean back in his chair and get some space, he was burning up, hands digging into his thighs as he tried to breathe. This fucker needed to get the hell away from him now, and stop lecturing him.

He opened his mouth,

“I was literally just giving-”

The teacher’s hand came down on the empty desk in front of him, a loud smack echoing across the walls and Tommy’s mouth snapped shut.

“Do not talk back to me young man.” He said, and Tommy even felt some spittle land on his face.

His lip curled. His heart was pounding, and his eyes were locked onto the fire raging in the man's gaze. The room was suffocating, and all he could feel was the heat of anger. Sparks took to gasoline and he unfurled like a bonfire.

"Alright *bitch*." He ignored the laughs from the room, feeling like hot ants were climbing all over him and launching up to rid himself of the feeling. His chair clattered to the ground, stuff knocked askew on the desk. "It's not my fucking fault you have a stick so far up your ass!"

The teacher turned red, eyes bulging out of his head like some lizard as he threw his hand out. This time Tommy did flinch, doing his best to cover it.

"Office now!" He shouted, veins bulging and nose scrunched like Tommy was a sour lemon he just bit into.

Or a roach he'd just crushed with his shoe.

He stepped back, kicking the chair further away. He was shaking and he just wanted to go, to run away. He ignored the eyes of his peers, making his way to the door quickly, and doing his best to keep away from the teacher who was glaring holes in his skull. Just as he was about to get to the door, there was a clatter behind him.

His head shot back, worried the teacher had fucking lost it and he might actually be in some danger.

But it wasn't the teacher,

The kid he'd just been talking to had stood up, pushed some of his books to the ground, a scowl deep on his face. He seemed genuinely pissed, and Tommy felt disbelief flood him as he realized the anger wasn't directed at him, but at the teacher.

He opened his mouth, poised to make a retort before,

"Just go Tubbo!" The teacher pointed to the door,

His mouth snapped shut and with a final glare he pathetically kicked his chair back. Tommy watched as the cheap plastic thing just squealed against the floor, barely a few inches away. The kid groaned frustrated, before awkwardly shoving it so it fell on its side.

Tommy bit back a smile as the chair landed almost gently on the ground, very contrasted by the loud bang he had made.

"He was just giving me a pen." He grumbled, brushing past the teacher and heading to Tommy.

They met eyes, and that's all Tommy needed before he was walking out the door, kid hot on his heels. The classroom door shut behind them, and immediately Tommy felt much cooler. The smell of gasoline long gone, and the heat of fire just a warm afterglow. He took a steadying breath before taking off aimlessly down the hall. His eyes darted around, catching on every door and person he passed.

“Wait up!” He heard the sound of footsteps and then the kid was side by side with him again. He smiled at Tommy like they hadn’t just stormed out of a classroom together. “I’m Tubbo.”

“Tommy.” He replied, sizing Tubbo up. “Why’d you do that?” He asked bluntly, eyebrow raised as he scrutinized Tubbo.

He just shrugged, “You gave me a pen.”

Was this kid stupid or something? Or was everyone in this town fucking crazy?

Tommy looked away, a long sigh almost past his lips, “That teacher was a bitch.” He spat, fists curling at his sides and pace quickening.

Where was it?

“Yeah, Mr. Smith is always fucked like that. You know one time he- Wait you know the office isn’t this way right?” Tubbo interrupted himself, brows furrowing as he reached for Tommy.

He dodged the hand, stopping in his search. They stood in the middle of the hallway, Tubbo giving him a challenging gaze, and Tommy could already feel a headache coming on.

“I know.” He said, rolling his eyes. He looked around, no one seemed to be in this section of the school with them.

“Okay then why-” His eyes caught on it, the door he’d been looking for and before he could think too much about it he was grabbing Tubbo’s arm and yanking him forward. “What the fuck-”

“Just shut up!” Tommy said, pulling them quickly along and shoving Tubbo through the bathroom door.

They stumbled in, and Tommy made sure the door shut fully closed behind him before turning back to Tubbo. Tubbo who had yanked his arm back, crossing them in front of his chest and glaring at Tommy like he’d killed his first born.

“This isn’t the office.” He said stupidly.

Tommy threw his hands out. “No *shit* . Are you daft?”

Tubbo had the gall to look offended. “You’re just weird.” He said, gesturing to Tommy like it explained everything.

“Oh thanks, I’m not the one who got sent to the office with a kid he doesn’t even know,” Tommy said something like anger but much nicer squirming in his stomach.

Tubbo threw his arms out, looking perturbed. “You gave me a pen!” He shouted.

Tommy laughed, the tension from the day breaking and the reality of the situation hitting him. “You’re insane.” He said, absolutely no bite in his words.

The other rolled his eyes, but there was a smile on his lips. “We’re going to get in so much shit. They’re going to realize we’re not in the office,”

Tommy snickered, “Oh you’re a little bitch now? Tub-boh.” He mocked, a smile stretching across his face as he enjoyed the offended expression on Tubbo’s face.

“We’re probably on camera Tommy!” He said, stomping his foot petulantly, and Tommy almost lost it.

“They’re literally not-”

There was the sound of something dropping and both of them froze. Eyes wide, Tommy turned his head just in time to see someone pick a phone up from the floor underneath the stall.

“Oh my god, is there someone else in here?” Tubbo asked him.

They eyed each other, inching closer to the door when they heard the stall door unlock. Tommy tried to mouth ‘run’ to Tubbo, but he didn’t seem to get it and instead looked confused and whisper shouted ‘what’ back at him.

They both turned to watch the person awkwardly shuffle out of the stall, the door creaking on its hinges. Tommy really didn’t think he’d find a motherfucker lankier and taller than Wilbur, but here he was in all his glory. A teen who was far too tall, eyes rimmed red, and hands clutching themselves like he was nervous about everything.

“Uh, hey.” He said, shrinking under the gaze of the two boys eyeing him like vultures.

“Have you fucking been in there the whole time?” Tommy asked stupidly, brain not catching up with his mouth.

If possible the kid paled further, nodding a little hesitant as his hands knotted in and out of each other. Tubbo’s gaze snapped to Tommy who suddenly felt like prey being hunted.

“Fuck we have an accomplice!” He shouts, the other kid flinching from the volume of the voice reverberating in the tiny bathroom they’re packed into.

Before he can say anything in rebuttal the kid clears his throat and speaks,

“Technically I’d be a witness.” He chimes in, still looking a bit sick. He really wasn’t good at hiding his anxiety, Tommy thought, worried about the hands that were constantly fidgeting in front of him.

This was a load of shit. He was fucking tired and he’d be damned if he had to go to the office on the first day he spent at school. Getting into trouble at the foster home was the last thing he needed right now.

He pointed at the lanky fucker, straightening up and trying to look bigger than he was, “ *Well* you’re also skipping class aren’t you!” He gestured at his appearance, particularly stuck on

the red-rimmed eyes and fidgeting hands. “Didn’t sound like you were shitting in that stall huh big man?”

“ *Dude* .” Tubbo hisses, seemingly taken aback at how crude Tommy was.

The lanky fuck blinked in surprise, his lips curling up a small amount. “How could you tell?”

Tommy scoffed, crossing his arms. “I know what a fucking panic attack looks like motherfucker.”

“Damn.” Tubbo muttered quietly, and Tommy ignored it.

“I’m not going to tell you on guys.” The kid said quickly, hands turned up like he was afraid Tommy would attack him.

He took a deep breath, brain whirring to catch up with everything. If they were treating this like a crime, which technically now that he thought about it, with his record might have some actual backlash, then they needed to minimize the fallout. Or simply not get caught.

“Hey, I’m Tubbo.”

The smartest thing to do would be pretending to go to the principle, not going, not getting a call home, and making it safely to second period like nothing happened. Which meant they would have to remain unseen until the bell rang.

Shit, but their stuff was also in the room, Tommy dropped his head in his hands. And if Mr.Fuckface had alerted the office they were coming-

“My name's Ranboo. I uh- like your sweatshirt?”

But they would be using the intercoms if they had been alerted and hadn’t arrived, it had been a good fifteen minutes or so since they’d left.

“Dope, I really *don’t* like yours.

His knuckles were bloody, he had a shiner, and he didn’t have a great record. If he was already labeled as a troublemaker on the first day- His feet ached.

“Oh.”

God, he had really fucked himself over.

“Wait, I meant I liked it?”

And he had a witness, shit and he’d dragged Tubbo into this.

“It’s okay you don’t have to-”

“No- ughhh I’m sorry it’s just really ugly.” Tommy’s hands dragged down his face as he sighed in frustration, he was off his game. “You’re like- cool though.”

He perked up at the sound of something approaching, shifting back into the present moment and abandoning the thrashing thoughts in his head.

“Thanks.”

“Guys shut up.” He hissed quietly, finally looking at the two who were standing awkwardly in front of each other. Tubbo was smiling a little, and Ranboo was still fidgeting with his hands, but at least the red had faded from his eyes.

The sound returned and Tommy stiffened when he realized what it was. Coming down the otherwise quiet hallway was the sound of footsteps, echoing on the walls and heading straight to the bathroom.

He had less than a second when he saw the shadow of feet under the light peeking from the door.

He looked to the two of them, who were looking back at him with rapt attention.

Look Tommy wasn’t soft or anything, he didn’t give a fuck about anyone but himself, but these guys were in it just as much as him. He didn’t want to help them out or anything, but maybe they’d rat him out or something. So, he did what he had to do, which just so *happened* to be grabbing the both of them and shoving them into the stall.

They didn’t even have time to protest before he was coming in after them, shutting the door behind him, and putting a finger up to his lips. Both of them instantly quieted, and the creak of the heavy bathroom door filled the silence for them.

“Yeah and Ms.Puffy said she’d be tutoring or whatever, which is something you definitely need.” A loud voice said, probably the owner of the obnoxiously orange vans.

Tommy’s stomach dropped when another set of even worse, bright green vans appeared behind them. Cute, they were matching, he rolled his eyes.

“The hell man.” Green said, and the door slammed shut behind them.

Tommy honed in on the two others packed like fucking sardines in the bathroom stall with him. Ranboo looked, well, horrified, to say the least. He had his palm pressed to his mouth like he was terrified to make a sound, and he was staring right at Tommy like he was a god he had to plead with to be saved.

Tubbo was looking back and forth between the two of them, mouth open like he wanted to speak but knew he couldn’t. Tommy, ever the smart big man of the situation gestured for Ranboo. Who did not move an inch.

‘Come here.’ he mouthed, waving him over more aggressively.

Ranboo looked confused as well as panicked and Tommy wanted to scream. Instead he slowly moved in front of Ranboo, pointing down to their feet which were now in line with each other. Then he gestured to Tubbo.

‘They’ll see us’ He enunciated slowly, hoping the other would understand a little.

Slowly a look of understanding dawned on Tubbo’s face, and Tommy breathed out a quiet sigh of relief.

They might actually make it out of this

And then everything went wrong at once,

Ranboo, whose hand had now dropped from his mouth, and instead gripped tightly onto Tommy’s arm -like he was bracing himself for the second coming of christ- stared in abject horror as Tubbo, motherfucking Tubbo, who they had just met,

Slowly placed his foot on the toilet seat.

Immediately Tommy made to grab him, bringing out an arm to catch onto his sleeve.

It didn’t do what he had hoped.

The stupid fucker took this as encouragement and smiled at him, mouthing a thank you. Tommy was a smart guy, a mastermind even, the quickest of quick thinkers, but even he couldn’t stop what was about to happen.

Tubbo, using his hand as support, lifted his other foot and attempted to stand on the toilet seat, crouching low so he wouldn’t peek over the top of the stall. Ranboo’s hand shot out to steady Tubbo, but it was futile. Sure, Tubbo was short enough that he wouldn’t be seen, and it could’ve worked.

But, try balancing on a crusty ass school toilet seat in a pickle with two other people you just met stuffed in there with you, and add the pressure of your parents finding out weighing on you like a stack of bricks.

Suffice to say, Tubbo went down like that stack of bricks.

Tommy watched, knowing already where this was going to go as Tubbo tipped like the fucking leaning tower of pizza. Both he and Ranboo rushed forward, doing their best to prevent the fall, but it was too late. Tubbo’s foot slipped as he lost balance, and with a loud splash and thunk it fell into the toilet bowl.

Ranboo screamed as he was the first in the splash zone, getting toilet water all over his jeans. Tubbo sloshed around in the bowl, arms waving around to try and balance, and Tommy ripped him out before he could fall worse.

Tubbo, now fully on the ground, knocked into Ranboo, who’s wet pants smashed into Tommy.

A match was lit.

“Fuck!” Tommy muttered, a bit too loud for the echoing walls in the bathroom.

“Um.” One of the vans cleared their throat and all of them paused.

Frantic breaths filled the air, as their eyes darted across each other. Tubbo mouthing something rapidly Tommy couldn't catch, probably something like ‘what the fuck do we do’ and Ranboo who had gone ramrod straight stared at Tommy with wide terrified eyes.

“Dude? Are there three sets of shoes under that stall?”

Tubbo’s mouth stopped moving, going slack like he was a man on a mission accepting the finality of his death. Tommy bit so hard into his cheek he was sure he was bleeding, and Ranboo, who had taken to staring just past Tommy’s shoulder looked-

Holy fuck was he about to cry?

“Yeah I think-”

Everything else faded away, and Tommy felt like a pond stilling after a ripple, or more accurately, the lit match falling into gasoline.

He exploded.

The stall door kicked open with a bang, lock probably busted to hell, he had one hand on Ranboo’s sleeve, and one on Tubbo’s. And then he *booked* it.

“Run bitches!”

He collided bodily with the heavy door of the bathroom, unworried on how it would bruise later, and he hauled ass.

“Holy fuck!” He heard a shout behind him.

“What the fuck?”

They cleared the door and the voices faded, but he kept running, hands dropping the sleeves of his classmates.

“Wait,” There was a harsh tug on his arm and he was redirected. “Wrong way!”

They ran side by side through the otherwise empty hallways, the sound of their shoes clattering down past the lockers and classes. Tommy just prayed no teachers or staff members would be out and about.

“Can we not run?”

“This was so STUPID.”

A laugh bubbled out of his throat as they all haphazardly scattered around the poor girl stood frozen in the hall about to be hit. Ranboo shot out a timid “sorry” like he wasn’t an absurdly tall dude absolutely tearing up shit in the hallway, and that was all it took for Tommy’s laughter to erupt.

He could hear Tubbo laughing behind him as they got to the exit, his hands pushing out next to Tommy on the door. “Hurry- hurry!” he laughed, pushing the door and Tommy.

They got out, the hot sun hitting their backs, light blinding their eyes. Tubbo stopped next to Tommy, still laughing like he’d won the lottery. Tommy turned, worried for a second until he saw Ranboo trail up behind them a smile on his face.

“That was so stupid.” He said, mirth woven through his voice like sweet honey.

Tommy’s laughter came to an end, but a smile stretched across his face like clouds parting for the sun nonetheless. “I know.” He breathed, heart hammering in his chest, and adrenaline tingling in his bones.

“We’re so fucked!” Tubbo said.

For a minute none of them spoke, soaking up the sun and catching their breaths as they settled down in new found safety. Tommy tried to think of what to say but then Tubbo broke the silence for him,

“So, do you guys want to be friends?”

On the way back from school, Tommy got to the car right at three. Wilbur was jamming out to a song as expected, and Techno was already in the passenger seat. He was relieved he wouldn’t have to sit in the car alone with Wilbur. It had been a long first day, but his chest was lighter when he got the occasional buzz on his phone from the new numbers he’d added. He officially had five numbers in it now, and that was a record for him.

He clambered into the car, not bothering to say anything to either of the two. Instead, he opted to ready himself for the reckless ride back. Tucking his stuff in properly and testing the seatbelt. Maybe he’d slip through it and right out the window, you could never be too safe. Techno seemed to use the seatbelt normally so Tommy refrained from wrapping it around himself before plugging it in.

While Tommy was debating the strength of a seatbelt, Wilbur adjusted the rear view mirror, brown eyes dancing over Tommy’s slouched form, pausing on the reopened scab on his hand.

“Something happen?” He asked, interrupting his own music to speak.

It brought the attention of the whole car, and Tommy quickly looked away from the seatbelt wondering if he had been too obvious. Maybe Wilbur would be offended he was terrified of his driving, but he really shouldn’t considering it was absolute dogwater. If he was any less

tired he would've noticed both of them staring at him through the rearview, exchanging glances of their own that no one else could probably interpret.

Instead, he raised a brow, confused about why Wilbur was choosing to talk to him. "No." He said studying the scrunched face Wilbur was making through the rearview. Damn, he was dramatic. He was probably a theater kid but Tommy didn't want to ask, then Wilbur might think he was like interested in his life or somethin.

Which would be bad.

Techno went back to reading his book, a different one from this morning as he must've finished the last. Wilbur to his dismay, didn't lose interest though and instead twisted around in his seat. Tommy, who'd unfortunately sat right behind him, leaned back at the sudden proximity. When Wilbur turned down his music, Tommy sent a quick prayer to whatever god above would listen.

Wilbur pointed at his hand, mouth curled down in a frown. "Your knuckle is fucked up."

Tommy's face scrunched, displeased immediately with where this conversation was going. Was this a fucking interrogation? He didn't need to be questioned about shit, and why the hell would Wilbur care? Briefly, he wondered if he'd seen his file, but quickly shoved that dangerous thought down. There was no way. Right? Something hot and defensive bubbled up inside him, and he tensed like a string pulled taught.

"Maybe you're the one who's fucked up." He retorted, glaring at the fucker with the most vicious look he could manage .

Wilbur just scoffed, eyes dancing around Tommy like he was looking for an answer. Tommy just shrunk back, he'd had enough stares for one day. Thankfully Wilbur didn't seem to find anything he was looking for, because he turned back around and Tommy felt immediate relief.

"Dad's gonna ask about it." He said, acting indifferent.

Tommy's mood soured at the word 'dad'. Philza wasn't his dad, and he would never be. He didn't know why Wilbur had to flaunt it like that. He pointedly looked out the window at the stragglers still walking in the parking lot. There was a group pushing each other, laughing and joking and Tommy felt something like envy. It looked like one of the students and three of his younger siblings, all bouncing around him like overexcited puppies. They had probably come to pick him up, looking at their older brother like he had hung the moon.

He looked down at his hand, pushing at the broken skin on his knuckle and watching as blood trickled out. He'd never know what that felt like. To look up at someone like that, to have someone look at him with the same care that kid had for his stupid ankle-biter siblings. People like him didn't have people like that.

"I just accidentally reinjured it." He said begrudgingly, wiping at some of the blood with his sleeve.

Wilbur seemed suspicious of his answer, still peering at him, and just he wanted to go home. Away from the stares, away from the picture-perfect families outside, and away from everything that made longing churn in his gut.

He just shrugged, coming up with the best answer he could give without having to explain further,

“Public bathrooms are wild man.”

Chapter End Notes

Yessss so all our main characters have made an appearance and introductions are finally over. I can finally move on to the juicy shit. And if you didn't know this already I always end up writing way more chapters than I intend to. Do not fret we will finally get some sibling bonding good lord. I wonder who Tommy would bond with first, Techno or Wil? What do you think??

Scream at me in the comments or come chat, it's a serious motivator. I can talk about this foster au forever.

Glass

Chapter Notes

This chapter was supposed to involve a lot more plot, but this thing is 9k already. I'm drawing the line because I'm not dropping a chapter over 10k. So, I'm splitting it into two chapters! Welcome, to part one, and mind the tags I added.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Sometimes Tommy forgot that he was a bad person. But life always had a funny way of reminding him if he ever got too comfortable.

Things had been going surprisingly well, and it had Tommy paranoid. Philza had been out quite a bit doing his doctor shit, and the house felt just a bit emptier without him, not that Tommy would ever tell him. He always made sure to tell Tommy to have a good day at school and ask him about his day. If he wasn't in the house sometimes Tommy would get messages from him.

At first Tommy had just ignored them, but seeing all of them pile up on read made him feel kind of bad. He hadn't gone soft or anything, but at least now he responded to the 'Good morning! Have a great day at school :D' messages with a thumbs up.

The weekend after his first week at school, they had gone grocery shopping together so Tommy could pick out some of the stuff he liked in his packed lunches. He tried to insist that he would pack his own, but Philza had taken to making them between his shifts and leaving them in the fridge for him. The shopping trip had been, well, somewhat pleasant surprisingly. He felt less bad when Philza forced him to buy stuff now because he knew he definitely wasn't short of cash with the job he had.

He still refused to look at the total of course.

He had two friends now, after what had happened his first day, Tubbo and Ranboo had taken to sitting with him at every lunch. Luckily they had a class which they were all in, biology, but otherwise, they met at each other's lockers. He'd been hesitant at first, but the two of them seemed genuinely cool.

Apparently, Ranboo didn't have a lot of friends, -Tommy suspected none- but he never brought it up. Tubbo was a bit odd, so not a lot of people hung around him. The second lunch period they had together Tommy watched Tubbo crush up a bunch of smarties to snort lines. His nose was fucked up until the next day after that, and a sugary pink powder remained on his nostril.

When they were in Mr.Smith's class they passed notes, and sometimes they'd make faces at each other when things got particularly unbearable. It's not like Tommy had never had

friends, but there was a difference from friends for survival at the home, and friends he actively wanted to hang out with.

There was one class in which neither Tubbo or Ranboo were in, and it was his last class, photography. It was a class he didn't hate, the teacher was fine, but it's not like he had chosen it. The weight of a camera in his hands was unfamiliar, but not unwelcome. He usually kept to himself during the period, frequenting the darkroom to experiment with developing his film. A good majority of the class did digital, but those were the ones who could bring their own camera. Tommy would rather die than ask Philza to get him a camera, so he just borrowed a film camera for the semester from the teacher. There were probably four other people in the class who did film, wherein lied his newest problem.

The group project. It was a joint mini portfolio that was created over the entire semester. The teacher figured having newbies create their own full portfolio would be too much, so instead, he decided to pair people up.

Tommy did not start at the beginning of the semester. He would've been fine scrounging up his own portfolio -or just not doing the project at all- but the teacher was overjoyed because there was one kid in the class who did not have a partner for the project.

Tommy bounced his foot up and down under the table, eyeing the door of students shuffling in and wondering which one would be his newest problem. He didn't have to wait long, because Mr.Halo perked up when a student stepped in,

“Dream! Could we have a chat at my desk real quick?”

He watched Dream walk over to him and Tommy took the time to size him up. He was just a bit taller than Tommy, shaggy uncombed dirty blond hair and freckles that shifted around the smile he was sending Mr.Halo. He had a small deflated backpack that hung off one shoulder, which he hadn't even bothered to zip up all the way, and the most prominent was the varsity jacket.

Every part of him screamed senior, Tommy deflated.

Fucking hell.

Him being his partner was only confirmed when Mr.Halo had said something that had Dream's attention snapping right to him, a lazy smile on his face. Tommy looked away, attention turning down to his phone which was actually getting notifications for once. His face screwed up when he saw a message on there from someone he'd never expected one from,

Wilbur

techno went home early 2day

dad comin home late tonight

His brows furrowed as he stared at the message. Techno had seemed fine in the car this morning, he'd been scrolling on his phone and talking to Wilbur about his new training program. Though it was more like Wilbur had forced the information out of him, Tommy didn't know what he was training for but he didn't think he needed more training. Techno was pretty ripped, but Tommy couldn't guess what sport he was in.

Tommy

Is he sick or smth

Wilbur

Yeah

Tommy waited a second to see if Wilbur would send something to elaborate but he never did. Did he even want details? It wasn't like he was worried or anything, but he did live with the dude. It wasn't weird to ask if he was worried about catching whatever he might have, right?

Tommy

Is he okay?

He typed out, finger hovering over the send button. Maybe he could phrase it less wimpy, more like a big man would. He could just-

"Hey, Tommy right?" A voice asked that had Tommy startling. He shoved his phone in his pocket, looking up just in time to see Dream plop down on the chair next to him.

"Yeah." He responded hesitantly, wary of him. Just his luck that the dude would be extroverted enough to sit right next to him instead of going to his usual seat.

"I'm your partner for the portfolio." He smiled, slinging off his backpack to shove under the table. Tommy had specifically chosen the table because no one else sat at it, the class not being one of very many students. Now though, he guessed he wouldn't be sitting alone anymore.

He looked away from him, his stare was kind of intense. "Cool." He responded, already wanting the conversation to be over.

"Hey uh," A hand dropped down on the table in front of him, fingers drumming to a tune he didn't know. Almost immediately Tommy noticed the scars on his knuckles, disrupting the otherwise unmarred skin of his hand. "You wouldn't happen to be the same kid from the bathroom would you?"

Tommy's brows furrowed,

Bathroom? What-

He stiffened, eyes dropping to the familiar bright green vans he hadn't noticed Dream had been wearing until now. His eyes shot up to meet Dream's, wide and unblinking. It was him

who had been in there with his friend, Tommy hadn't gotten a good look at either of them in his rush but he'd recognize the shoes anywhere. They'd barely gotten away with that incident, lucky that no one had said anything about it, especially since he was 90% sure he'd knocked one of the dudes over in his escape.

Shit.

"Damn dude." Dream interrupted his thoughts, sounding far too blasé. "No need to look so worried, I thought it was pretty funny."

So he wasn't about to get his lights knocked out, cool.

Tommy took a harsh breath in, feeling a flood of relief that he wouldn't be getting a call home anytime soon. He'd make sure to bring this up with his friends at lunch tomorrow, or just send them a text later.

"Could've said that first fucker." He grumbled, leaning back in his chair in an attempt to further relax.

He was always way too high strung, he knew he was probably gonna get mad blood pressure issues when he was all old and crinkly.

Dream chuckled, fingers coming to a pause in their needless dance. "My bad." He said, sounding not the least bit sorry. "You know, I'm glad I finally got to meet you. I've been waiting for you."

Tommy froze, eyes narrowing to look Dream straight in the eyes, the familiar thrum of fear crawling across his skin. "Excuse me?" That had been a really weird thing to say, and felt far too friendly for strangers.

Dream rested his head in his other hand, propping it up on the desk with a sense of casualty that unnerved Tommy. There hadn't been a moment since he sat down that he wasn't making eye contact, and it had his skin absolutely crawling. Why hadn't he noticed the way Dream had all his attention on him before?

"You're with the Crafts." He said, and it had Tommy biting his cheek so hard he felt the tang of blood.

That was the name of his foster family.

"How the fuck did you know that?" He asked through clenched teeth, reevaluating the situation to see if he missed anything important.

He hadn't told Ranboo or Tubbo he was a foster, let alone anyone else, and Techno wasn't much of a talker. He felt weirdly vulnerable under the gaze of Dream, why'd he know who he was? He couldn't think of Techno ever mentioning an asshole friend. If Dream had known he was going to come here, then it was bad news. Tommy knew about guys like this, he knew Dream wanted something to do with him, and whatever it was he didn't want to fuck with it.

“C’mon, the Crafts? They’re notorious around here.” His lips curled up further, flashing an unsettling amount of teeth. “But I guess you wouldn’t know that about them since you’re just a *foster* huh?” The hand he’d had on the table reached out, and before Tommy could move away a hot finger was pressing into one of the scabs on his knuckle. Not hard enough to hurt, but not gentle in any sense of the word. “You seem like you get into some trouble.” He said, pushing further on Tommy’s scab.

Tommy was frozen under the pressure of his finger, something like adrenaline having him feeling antsy. He didn’t like the tone he had taken, nor the smile on his face. He knew nothing about this guy, but this guy seemed to know far too much about him. When he got the courage, he pulled his hand back, and Dream let him go.

“Fuck off.” He growled hands curled tight in his pants to hide the shaking.

Dream whistled lowly, “Someone’s got his boxers in a twist.” He took his hand back, leaning back in his chair and finally giving Tommy room to breathe. “I heard they were getting a new foster and I was curious is all.” He explained, but Tommy was smart enough to know that there was something else up.

Why did he know about it though?

“Your vibes are actually fucking rank.” He spat, only causing Dream to laugh.

His laugh was the kind that wasn’t very loud, but he kind of wheezed when he did it. It didn’t seem disingenuous, but it wasn’t quite genuine either. His laugh sounded kind of like a lie dipped in honey, and palatable to even the most spiteful of people. Tommy almost got the urge to laugh with him.

“Sorry, I don’t make the best first impressions on people.” Dream admitted honestly like he knew every bit of asshole he was.

“Yeah no shit.” Tommy said, calming down just the slightest bit. He hadn’t made any move to hurt him or any threat. Maybe this dude wasn’t so bad, he was probably just stupidly paranoid and looking to far into things. “You a gossip or something?”

Dream shrugged, seeming like he hadn’t a care in the world. “I guess. I’m not exactly the nicest person to say the least.” He said, like it was an inside joke that Tommy was supposed to get. “I like to know what’s happening in *my* school.” His smile only widened when he said the phrase ‘my school’ and his tone held something that beckoned Tommy to read between the lines.

Oh.

Tommy slumped in his chair, still keeping a sharp eye on Dream in case, but otherwise, some of his guard was down. He knew guys like this, he was very familiar with them. Dream’s hands were almost an exact mirror of his, scarred knuckles and nails bitten to the quick.

“Should’ve just said you were into ‘shit’ instead of being a fucking weirdo.” He said, glad he wasn’t about to be kidnapped or some shit.

“Into shit?” Dream questioned innocently, a curious glint in his eyes.

Tommy scoffed, “Don't be daft.” He crossed his arms, looking at the clock and hoping class would start soon. “I’m not going to cause you, or your *group*, any trouble.” He grumbled, hoping he would get the hint.

Quicker than he could process, Dream reached forward ruffling his hair. Tommy batted his arm away, a scowl etched on his face. “Stop motherfucker.” He growled.

Dream paid him no mind though, and Tommy finally understood his deal. “Good to hear, kid. I don’t think my friends would be too happy if you were going to cause any- *problems*. ”

“Yeah well, you’re not the ones who should worry.” He explained, fidgeting with the hem of his shirt and staring at Mr.Halo like he could will him to start the fucking class.

“I kind of like you.” Dream said, leaning his crossed feet against the side of the table. “What are you, a freshman?” He asked, something smug in his voice.

Tommy was offended. “I’m a fucking sophmore.” He said, nose scrunched in disgust.

“Well Tommy, you just got yourself a senior brother.” His tone left no room to argue, and Tommy bristled but bit his tongue.

“Whatever.” Was all he said, looking pointedly away from Dream.

Statistically, everyone had a certain amount of asshole in them. And listen, Dream was an asshole, he seemed full of himself, he was suspicious, and he most definitely was trouble. But that was the thing, Tommy was used to people like that. Ever since he’d come to this town with the Craft family, he’d been surrounded by people who were very much unfamiliar. He was totally out of his element with friends, Philza, and his crazy sons. But Dream was nostalgic, there were assholes like him a dime a dozen.

Not only would Tommy rather be on his good side, since he seemed to have the school marked as his group's turf, but he also kind of liked him. Dream was predictable, he was comfortable in the way only things familiar were. He’d taken one look at Tommy’s knuckles and his black eye like they were something normal, nothing to ogle at. There was the comfort of knowing there was probably nothing he could do or say, that would scare a guy like him. So, he decided then and there he’d let Dream be his friend.

When class let out that day, he took his time packing his stuff up, waiting for everyone else to leave and Dream stayed with him. Dream had taken his phone and punched his number in. Tommy kind of looked forward to photography from now on. While his friends would fret over his healing, and Tommy felt like he had to bite his tongue whenever he said something worrying, Dream would be a breath of fresh air. During class Dream had shown him his other busted hand and told Tommy about the fucker he knocked the lights out of the night before. They’d had a good laugh about it, and Tommy didn’t feel so bad about his own scabs.

He’d gotten Tommy to share the story of the first fight he’d ever had, the one in kindergarten when he had tackled the kid who took a bit of his crayon, and Dream had teased him

relentlessly.

“You just gonna hang around?” Dream asked, the bell long since rung and the rest of the students gone. They both stood at their desk, nodding goodbye to Mr. Halo who had left for a staff meeting.

Tommy shrugged making his way to the door. “My friends said they’d meet me at my class before I went home, something they wanted to show me.” He explained stopping in the doorway and peering out at the moving crowd.

Dream walked up to him, leaning on the door and staring down at him. They were close, but Dream at least seemed to keep some space with him. “I’ll wait with you.” He decided, seeming to get comfortable perched in the doorway with him.

“I can handle my own.” Tommy snapped, kind of peeved.

“Shit, I know.” Dream said pointing at the eye, and Tommy felt calm in wake of the flood of pride. “Said I’d be a good senior brother, it’s more for my own peace of mind.”

Tommy just shrugged, not too sure about how to feel about the whole thing. “You lonely or something?” He didn’t get why a senior would want to hang around with some underclassman in an empty classroom.

“Nah, but I do have nothing better to do. Teachers been getting suspicious of me sticking around on school grounds, so I’m gonna look like I’m doing something.” He explained, eyes dancing around the crowd in the hallway like he was also searching for Tommy’s friends.

“Lame. Thought you were cool enough you wouldn’t have to worry about it.” Tommy shoved his hands in his pockets. Eyes dancing across all the people in the crowd, looking for a familiar pair he couldn’t miss.

So it caught him off guard when Dream sucker punched him in the arm, the sting of it jolting Tommy to attention.

“Damn you’re jumpy, better get used to it dude.” Tommy just ignored him and tried to stop himself from cradling his shoulder like a baby. “Oh yeah, and I don’t know if I have to tell you this but just in case.” Dream flicked something from his finger, then focused back on Tommy with an intensity that had him perking up. “Don’t tell the Craft’s you’re hanging out with me.”

Tommy raised a brow. “Why would I tell them shit- I mean what do they care.”

Dream smiled like he knew something Tommy didn’t and it had him just a bit pissed. “C’mon I just don’t want big brother Techno to come beat my ass when he finds out you’re hanging with a bad kid, is all.”

Now wasn’t that an image to behold? One time in the kitchen, he’d watched Techno stare at the spider stuck on the wall before slowly guiding it onto his hand and taking it outside. He was an intimidating guy, especially at night when he was rooting through the fridge and his

long pink hair got in front of his face when he turned to look at Tommy. It was like the girl from The Grudge, but cotton candy and buff.

He couldn't imagine Techno beating someone up really, but especially on his behalf.

Tommy just scoffed, rolling his eyes. "Techno wouldn't, and he's not my brother. They don't give a shit about what I'm up to," he said, pulling the phone from his pocket as it buzzed.

Wilbur

Wya? It's hot as fuck in this parking lot

fr it been 20 mins im roasting alive

He just ignored the message, shoving it further into his pocket. Dream held a knowing gaze and Tommy felt kind of embarrassed. He wasn't a fucking kid that needed people to check up on him, and Dream knew that at least, he didn't want him to think otherwise.

"Either way, we good?" Dream asked, brow raised.

Tommy wasn't stupid enough to tell any of them he was hanging out with a senior who seemed to be in some bad shit. He was used to not telling fosters about that stuff anyway, they'd just look down on him. They never understood.

"Yeah, we're cool. I won't say shit." Tommy shot a small smile at him hoping it was reassuring, before looking down at his ratty shoes.

"Heh." Dream chuckled, nudging at Tommy's foot with his own clean vans. "You should meet my friends, they'd like you." Tommy shifted his foot to step on top Dream's, who quickly pulled away.

"What, are they all clingy seniors?" He asked, trying to shuffle his foot out from underneath where Dream had trapped it.

That got Dream to laugh and Tommy's chest swelled with pride. Dream was cool, and yeah even Tommy could admit that. He felt pretty damn lucky he was his portfolio partner and not some idiot.

Dream seemed to give up on his battle, letting Tommy rest his foot on his triumphantly.

"Nah, most of us are seniors though." He said, leaning to rest his head back on the doorway. "We have fun."

He bet they did have fun, a lot of it. If his one class with Dream had taught him anything, it was that the dude knew how to break rules. And he must've been notorious at it. It was like Mr.Halo hadn't even seen him, because Dream had done nothing all class and got away with it. It was clear he had some sway in the school, and a lot of their classmates came up to him just to chat. He seemed well known.

He bet it was the same for his entire group.

Tommy deflated a little when he actually thought about it. Sure, he didn't follow rules, and he was a bad kid, but he'd done his best to stay away from 'groups'.

He fidgeted with the hem of his shirt, "I don't- I'm not into any shit y'know?" He said quickly, almost embarrassed to admit it. He knew they kind of batted around it in class, but you don't just have turf and beat people up for no reason. "I don't fuck with substances." He admitted.

Dream's hand rested on Tommy's shoulder, a reassuring pressure that didn't have Tommy wanting to pull away. "It's chill, I'm sober actually. You don't have to do anything you're uncomfortable with." He reassured him, it confirmed what had been unsaid throughout class.

Tommy just nodded, his throat was dry and his hands were kind of clammy, he didn't know why he felt so nervous. This was a nice school, and the majority of the kids had rich parents. Tommy wasn't a fool to what rich kids did with the huge allowances they had. Dream was probably loaded, and he knew there was definitely a reason he'd gained the school's respect. He knew all of that, and he'd seen it before, but for some reason he was nervous. The smile Dream shot him though, made him calm down just the slightest.

"Hey, Tommy!" He heard, jostling him from his thoughts and causing him to shrug off the hand on his shoulder.

Both boys looked up to see Ranboo and Tubbo, far across the hallway and stuck behind a group of stragglers. Tommy sent Tubbo a small wave, who was flailing his arms trying to get his attention. It was nice to see his friends, but he kind of wanted to stay with Dream.

"Huh... Those are your friends?" Dream asked hesitantly, a peculiar tone to his voice.

Tommy looked away from them, brows scrunched as he turned to Dream. He looked confused or maybe concerned, and it made something in his stomach twist. "Yeah?" He asked.

"Ranboo, and Tubbo right?" Tommy just nodded. "They actually... Hang out with you?" He trailed off, his brows furrowed like he was thinking about something.

Tommy felt himself bristle, he knew Dream was kind of an ass about phrasing things but it still peeved him. "Well, yeah. We met like last week, they're cool." He frowned, not liking the way Dream was looking at him. "What do you mean by that anyway?"

Dream's hands came up placatingly, and Tommy tried to back down a little. "Nothing. I just didn't think they'd hang out with someone like you." He explained,

'Someone like you'

The way he phrased it had Tommy's fists clenching, and he took a step back. "Excuse me?" He watched as Dream seemed to realize what he said, and an easy smile came to his face that just pissed Tommy off further.

He took some deep breaths, trying his best to not ruin a new friendship over his anger issues. He liked Dream a lot, but he hadn't liked the way his words seemed to be so sharp. They were snakes wrapping around his mind, trapping him and forcing him to face something he had buried deep.

"You know what I mean man, c'mon you can't tell me you hadn't thought about it." Dream shrugged, and Tommy felt himself droop a little. A whirlwind of emotions that had just been under the surface bubbling up. "Hey, look. I've been where you are okay? We're similar." Dream's hand returned to his shoulder, and Tommy looked up at him. "Just giving you some senior advice, those two are not like us. They're just not gonna get it."

Tommy opened his mouth to protest but shut it at the look on Dream's face. He wasn't looking at him with pity, not quite affection either, but it wasn't something Tommy had seen before. It had the knots in his stomach unfurling, it was understanding.

Tommy thought back to the scabs on his hands, the bruises that decorated his torso. He remembered getting a whole lecture from Tubbo about being safe, and Ranboo timidly asking him if he was okay every time he made a crude joke. He felt like an outsider like they just didn't understand, they were looking at him like someone who needed to be fixed.

Dream looked at him, like he was just a person. Like he knew Tommy was shattered glass on the floor that he didn't need to piece back together. He didn't feel the pressure to be good or to hide the shards. Tubbo and Ranboo crept around the shards, while Dream had barreled right through them uncaring if they'd stabbed him.

"They're cool though." Tommy trailed off, seeing them slip by people in the corner of his eye.

They were chatty, really chatty. Tommy didn't have to sit on his own for lunch, but he didn't feel seen either. Maybe Dream was right, it wasn't like they could understand what he was like. He'd probably just scare them off.

Dream sighed, ruffling a hand through his hair. "I know, I've been there. They're not going to accept you for who you are though." Tommy bit his lip, the snakes sinking their teeth into him and venom flowing into his blood. "You're setting yourself up to lose people." He continued, oblivious to the sinking of Tommy. "You should be around people who know who you are. Nip it in the bud now."

People, who know who he was? He didn't anyone in the world knew who he was, nobody but him.

His stomach twisted, and he shook Dream's hand off his shoulder no longer liking the feeling or warmth bleeding through his shirt. "What do you mean?" He worried his lip, eyes focused on the bright canvas of Dream's shoes.

Had the logo always been a smiley face decal?

"If it was me I would stop hanging out with them before they hurt you. I mean you're smart, I bet you've already thought about it." Dream complimented, eyeing Tommy with concern.

He had, he had quite a lot actually. Just earlier that day at lunch when he'd made a joke about that time he'd got his hand stuck in drywall, and they'd just looked at him concerned instead of laughing. He knew Dream and his friend would probably laughed and would have a story of their own.

"Anyway." Dream said, perking up and standing up to his full height. "I'm going to head out, they're almost over here. You have my number if you need anything." He said, before he was slipping out of the classroom far too fast for Tommy to get any words in.

He stared after him for a bit, feeling far too lost in his own head, it was like quicksand and the more he struggled the deeper he sunk. Before he could snap out of it he felt an arm reach over his shoulders.

"Hey, bitch!" Tubbo shouted, a bit loudly in his ear.

Tommy flinched away, and almost instantly Tubbo moved his arm off, a shy smile on his face and a quiet 'sorry' that had Tommy's stomach sinking. Even Ranboo had shot Tubbo a harsh look. They were treating him different like he was a kid, fragile, or something stupid like that.

He got the familiar feeling of hot ants crawling on his skin, the warmth of embers making him antsy. "I have to go." He bit out, not missing the looks the two shot at each other.

It was just the icing on the cake. They didn't understand, and they'd probably keep toeing around the shards of glass he was. Eyeing him like he was just something to ogle at, he didn't feel like a person.

"Oh uh- what about-" Tubbo tried to ask, but Tommy cut him off already over it,

"Bye." He said, hands clenching his backpack straps tight enough that the fabric might cut into his skin. Venom swirled in his veins as he rushed out of the building, feeling like something sick was forming inside of him. No matter how hard he tried to push the thoughts away, they came back.

When he got in the car, mostly in a daze of anger and hurt, he slammed the door. He wasn't really paying attention to his surroundings anymore, his mind somewhere far away. It felt like the venom was overflowing, and if he didn't get it out it would swallow him whole.

"Where the hell have you been?" Wilbur asked, turning around to glare at Tommy sweat sticking his curls to his face. "I've been waiting in the fucking car for-" He paused, grimacing as he saw the look on Tommy's face before his own fell flat. "What happened?" He asked, and the fake concern in his tone made Tommy's anger flare.

He knew he probably looked upset, he was never very good at hiding when he was mad. His fists liked to snap shut, and his face always got all red. He felt like he'd bitten a hole into his cheek with how hard he was grinding his teeth into it. Wilbur would be dumb not to realize it.

“Can we just go home?” He asked, barely holding back the potent venom that threatened to spill from his lips.

Wilbur just frowned at him before he was turning around to start the car. For the first time since he’d been there, Wilbur didn’t turn the radio on, and he didn’t say a word.

—

Techno had the flu and had been quarantined in his room since. Philza had been worried and took all of their temperatures. He had insisted that Tommy tell him if he even felt the slightest bit sick, but that wasn’t what was on Tommy’s mind. He’d skipped dinner, not saying a word to anyone in the house. He’d heard Wilbur whispering something to Philza, but didn’t have the energy to be mad that he was being talked about.

When Tommy went to school the next day it was like he was somewhere else. He didn’t say anything to Tubbo during class, and he just skipped the class he had with Ranboo. When it was time for lunch, he had taken one look at his friends from across the cafeteria laughing and seeming lost in their own world, and he’d turned away and left.

From then on, he didn’t eat lunch with them.

It was Thursday,

He had been stuffing his locker full of his textbooks, not bothering to organize. There were loose papers shoved in there, mostly undone homework, and lots of smushed ‘notes’ which were honestly just doodles. It was the end of the school day and he’d almost fallen asleep in his last class, but the idea of sleeping in the open had him waking right up. So, he was pretty tired and ready to get back to his room.

The only highlight of his day started to be seeing Dream in class, he’d stay a while with him after everyone left the classroom. They’d just talk about whatever, and Dream always filled him in on whatever his friends had gotten into the night before. Tommy found himself opening up rather easily to Dream, he told him about the first time he stole food from a convenience store. He’d gotten in trouble with a foster family, and they’d stopped allowing him food. So, he started to steal granola bars.

The day after that, Dream had plopped down at their desk, a pack of granola bars in his hands. Tommy was like 99% sure he had stolen them, but Dream had his own way of being a good person. He stuffed them in his closet in case Philza ever got mad, and Dream promised to take him to the store to loot if he ever needed.

Dream was like, his best friend.

He snapped out of his thoughts, shutting his locker door, making sure to shove everything in it. He sighed, thanking whichever god that it all fit this time. His peace was immediately cut off as he realized there’d been a face right where the door had been.

“Fuck!” He jumped, taking a few steps back as he saw the unblinking eyes staring at him.

“You weren’t in the cafeteria for lunch, and you haven’t been for two days.” Tubbo said, arms crossed and frown on his face.

Ranboo loomed just behind him, looking like he’d rather be anywhere else. They’d gotten pretty close Tommy had figured, he always saw the both of them together now and they looked happy. He’d just assumed they’d leave him alone and forget about him once they became close, but they had not stopped blowing up his phone. Well, Tubbo blew up his phone, Ranboo sent the occasional message wondering how he was doing.

He always responded to those ones, because the stupid image of Ranboo’s fidgeting hands and gentle smile after they’d first met was burned in his brain.

He was fine ignoring Tubbo though.

Well, not anymore if he’d resorted to waiting for him after school. He wondered when he’d get the damn hint.

“Wasn’t hungry.” He shrugged, hoping he could get rid of them soon.

It stung seeing them right in front of him, and he knew he was a little bitch who would just try and crawl right back. But this was the best for him, and them.

“Well, you’ve been off.” Ranboo chimed in, staring at Tommy with something that looked far too close to pity. Tommy was intensely turned off by this conversation.

“My ride’s here, I have to go.” He said quickly, not exactly lying. He’d been making Wilbur wait for a while recently, but since the first day he’d gotten no complaints about it.

Before either of them could protest he had walked away, ignoring Tubbo’s shouts from behind him.

He was doing a good thing, They’d cut themselves on his shards, and he’d just crack into more pieces.

—

Surprisingly, it was Ranboo who confronted him at the end of the week. It was the next day, he’d ignored all their messages and skipped all the classes they were in. He didn’t even care if he’d gotten a call home at this point, seeing them stung too much to bear. Plus, he’d asked Dream how many times he could skip before they called home, and he said he’d take care of it for him, whatever that meant. So, he just always sent Dream a text before skipping, and he was in the clear.

It was almost a mirror image of what had happened the other day. Tommy had been stuffing things in his locker. This time it was a gift from Dream, a really cool pocket knife he was pretty sure wasn’t allowed on school grounds. It was a grayish purple, and it felt dense and honestly a little expensive. When he’d flipped open the blade under the table, there was a little smiley etched in it, and Tommy found himself smiling back.

He didn't want to bring it home and risk anyone finding it. He stepped back, ready to shut his locker and go home when a hand slapped it closed for him.

Tommy almost flinched, but he followed the hand on his locker up and came face to face with Ranboo. Ranboo, and no Tubbo in sight. Ranboo who was 6'6 and glaring at him like he'd just kicked his mother.

"What is up with *you*?" He asked, and yeah, he was upset.

Shit.

"Nothing." Tommy said quickly, peeking around Ranboo's arm and staring longingly at the exit.

Maybe he could-

"Tubbo saw you sitting in the hallway eating lunch. You're avoiding us." He snapped, leaning down so he could stare Tommy in the eyes.

He knew this was probably inevitable but it didn't mean he was excited to deal with the fallout. He also hadn't been prepared for Ranboo to be the one about to throw hands, but life was always full of surprises.

"So what?" Tommy asked, grabbing his backpack straps to brace himself. "Who fucking cares?"

Ranboo rolled his eyes hard, just looking more pissed. "If you don't want us to be your friends, then just say so." He said, moving his hand from the locker to knot into the sweater at his side. "We won't bother you from then on, but it's rude because Tubbo keeps trying to reach out to you."

The 'so do I' was left unsaid, but Tommy picked up on it by the way Ranboo's eyes were shiny. He remembered what Dream had said, saying it was for the best. He didn't want to hurt anybody, and he also didn't want to get burned himself. He was angry at the world because it was stupid that things couldn't work out, but when had they ever?

He had to do what was best,

"Well, maybe I don't want to be friends!" He snapped, feeling frustration start to sizzle from somewhere deep. It wasn't at Ranboo, he knew that, but it had to spill. He couldn't hold it back, it was burning him from the inside out. "Have you ever thought of that? That maybe I'm avoiding you because of *that*?"

He watched Ranboo's face twist, somewhere deep in him there was regret, there was an overflow of guilt, but anger always drowned it all. It was all-consuming, a selfish emotion that dominated all the others. Anger was Tommy's best friend, it covered the broken, it covered the weaker emotions, it backed him up when nothing else could. But anger was fire, you couldn't control it, and you could *never* stop a fire once you had started it.

“Fine.” Ranboo said, looking just every bit as angry as Tommy. “But you know what?” He asked, a twisted smile on his face. “Remember when you said you knew what a panic attack looked like? Well, I know what self-isolating looks like, and it’s ugly on you.” He said, words sharp and digging like knives.

Tommy was taken aback, the words embedded far too deep to pull them out. He felt raw, exposed under Ranboo’s glare, and most importantly he was scared. Scared that Ranboo could see through him, that he understood, and more importantly that he had laid Tommy out bare.

Ranboo seemed to take a step back, no less angry, but some other emotion had taken over. “We want to be your friends.” He said, more firm than Tommy had ever heard him speak. “And you can sit here in this pity party, or you can come back and things can be like they were.” He brought a hand up, shoving a finger into Tommy’s chest for emphasis. “Because they were going well!”

The finger burned straight through his chest. He waited for Ranboo to pull away, to apologize like he was so used to him doing, but neither happened. He just stared into Tommy further and he had the terrifying realization that he’d been *wrong*,

Tommy didn’t like being wrong, he was sure no one did. Being wrong often led him to injury, misjudging a situation could make things dangerous, so when he was wrong? He didn’t apologize, he didn’t stick around to see the fallout, no. When Tommy was wrong, he ran away. He shut down, he got ready for a fight.

He didn’t say anything when he stepped away, and Ranboo didn’t run after him.

The venom had overflowed, it was spilling out on the hallway tile, trailing behind his shaking form in the parking lot, it was slicking up the door handle of the car. It was spilling, and spilling, and spilling.

Tommy had barely gotten the door open, hands shaking too bad to open it, and then he was sitting in his seat. The venom was pooling at his shoes, rising in the enclosed space, it had flooded the car, blocked his eyes, clogged his ears, stuffed in his throat. He couldn’t breathe, he couldn’t think, he couldn’t move.

He didn’t fight it, he sat, letting himself be swallowed by it, consumed in full.

He would never know what Wilbur had seen in the car when he got in that day, but he knew it must’ve been pretty bad. He didn’t remember too much of it either, but when he came to, he saw eyes.

The first color, brown, like melting milk chocolate warmed by the sun peeking through the car. A line, curved through lips, turned down and plummeting to the ground. The smell of hot wood, old sweaters, and mint. The feeling of damp, breath hitting his cheek, warm like the eyes. The taste of metal, like an old minted penny that had lingered on his tongue. The sound, the deep hum of an acoustic guitar, wood carved perfectly to produce a tune nothing could recreate. Strings vibrating at frequencies an eye couldn’t quite catch. A tune Tommy recognized had a pattern.

He followed the pattern, losing himself in the notes, in the journey it took him on through the venom. Pulling him along like a kite in the wind, a rhythm he could hold onto. It held his hand until he could feel his chest, rising and falling from under the weight of a palm. It danced with him until he felt his own palm, pressed to something soft and warm that rose in time with his own breathing.

The song ended, and Tommy began.

He was in a sweltering car, lungs burning like he'd just finished running. There was weight pressed to his ears, the cushion of padding from what he assumed was headphones. One hand had been clutching tight to his seat belt, the other was knotted in the fabric of Wilbur's sweater. Wilbur who's mouth had been muttering quiet reassurances he couldn't hear. Wilbur, who had his hand pressed against Tommy's chest like he was worried it would stop moving.

When his tongue could move in his mouth again, he spoke,

"I'm sorry."

He couldn't hear himself, the headphones blocked any noise from the outside world. But he could tell he at least spoke loud enough that Wilbur had heard him, because the hand on his chest was gone, and the frown only deepened.

Wilbur stared at him, and Tommy stared back. He was quiet and docile under the weight of his panic attack.

Slowly, Wilbur's hands came up, and Tommy watched his focused expression as he pulled the headphones down his head. The second they left his ears, Tommy could hear the thrum of the car engine running, the sound of Wilbur's breaths, and the otherwise silence that had taken over them.

Wilbur was half laying on the console of the car, fully turned around in his seat. It looked far too uncomfortable for someone as tall as him, but somehow he managed. Tommy was surprised he'd been able to do so without him noticing.

"Hey." Wilbur said, voice far quieter and subdued than anything Tommy thought he could produce. "You here now?" He asked, eyes searching his face for some kind of answer.

Tommy swallowed, almost unsure he would be able to speak. "Yeah." He responded, his voice even quieter than Wilbur's.

He could feel Wilbur's breath of relief as he slouched onto his propped-up elbows. "*Oh fuck.*" He cursed to himself, sounding way too shaken.

Tommy wasn't sure what to say to him, he was just barely aware of his own body in the car, the complexities of human conversation had completely evaded his grasp. But he couldn't shake the feeling he had to say something.

"Headphones." He said plainly, watching as Wilbur studied him with a question in his eyes. "They seem expensive." He followed up, his voice breaking halfway through from his dry

throat.

The smallest of smiles stretched across Wilbur's face, so minuscule it probably couldn't even be considered a smile. Tommy expected a retort of some kind, maybe some teasing but Wilbur didn't say any of the sort.

"They're noise canceling." He said, "My favorite."

Tommy just nodded, the action taking way too much of his already depleted energy. He wondered how long they'd been sitting in Wilbur's car, turning his head to see no other cars left in the parking lot. How long had he been gone? How far had he time traveled this time?

"You dissociated." Wilbur supplied, almost like he was reading Tommy's thoughts.

Dissociation didn't sound as fun as time travel Tommy thought.

Wilbur made no move to turn back around, he seemed to have no interest in leaving the parking lot. He was just kind of staring, but that was okay because Tommy was staring back. He felt weird, and nothing felt normal anymore. It was almost like he was in a dream, all his senses felt hazy.

It also felt like he was seeing Wilbur for the first time. Maybe it was because his stare never lingered on him too long before then. He had well-defined features, but he looked overwhelmingly soft when they weren't so animated. In fact, he looked kind of sad, and weirdly enough, Tommy didn't think he liked when he looked sad.

"I got into an argument." He offered, hoping it would be enough to explain whatever weird situation he'd gotten them both in.

Wilbur shifted, probably uncomfortable, "How?" He asked.

Tommy shrugged, head leaning back to relieve his muscles from the strain of holding it up. "I fucked up, Ranboo was right."

"Right about what?" Wilbur pushed, like he was trying to fit the puzzle pieces of Tommy's mess together. Or rather, analyze the shards of glass to picture how they'd been knocked over.

"I pushed them away to isolate myself." He answered, monotone.

"Tommy." Wilbur said softly, far more emotional weight than he had ever heard in his name before. "You need to talk to them."

When Tommy ran away, he never came back. It just wasn't something he did.

A humorless smile stretched across his cracked lips, ripping them open. "I've never done that before." He admitted softly for some reason. "I don't think they'll want to hear it."

He'd never thought he'd confide in Wilbur before. Wilbur was kind of loud, he was also super-expressive when he wanted to be, a proper wild card. Tommy never knew if he would

be shouting lyrics at the top of his lungs, or shut in his room quiet for the entire day. He also just didn't trust anyone. But he knew he should've trusted Ranboo and Tubbo, and when he didn't it made things fall apart. So, maybe it was because of what had happened, or it was just the weird atmosphere in the car that made him open up in front of Wilbur.

"They will." Wilbur said confidently, none the wiser to the epiphany that Tommy was having. "And if they don't? Fuck them, they're cunts anyway."

If Dream had walked over his glass shards, and his friends had just crept around them; then Wilbur had just sat down next to them, picking each one up with deft fingers and examining them...

He swallowed thickly, hoping that this wouldn't backfire, that Wilbur wouldn't take off with pieces of him. "Promise?" He asked, entirely unsure if he was just talking about his friends anymore,

Wilbur just looked at him for a second, eyes bouncing back and forth like he was trying to figure something out.

But then,

He smiled, slowly and more genuine than Tommy had ever seen since that point. "I promise." He whispered, "Or you can keep my headphones."

At that moment, Tommy felt like he wasn't the only one who had decided to open up.

"Deal." He agreed.

Chapter End Notes

I think it's easy, especially with a Tommy-centric foster fic to forget that the others have shit going on too. And I kind of did that myself. Connecting with someone is a two-way street, and a lot of times people don't hit it off right away. You can talk to someone without actually communicating anything. Up until this point, Wilbur and Tommy had never really been communicating, sure they'd said shit to each other, but most of it was gated off.

I wanted them to connect. Having Tommy move-in wasn't just hard for him, but it was hard on Wilbur and Techno as well. Especially for Wilbur. I hope I can better express that, but I think they both needed a moment to realize the world wouldn't explode if they were nice to each other.

Part two of this chapter is going to be more centered on the family. So, what did you think? Scream in the comments, I love all of them last chapter and they really motivated me when I was finishing this one. <3

Shatter

Chapter Notes

Hnnngm rw vrew hvrw

I'm back, next chapter is already written but unedited, give it a day or two to be up. Yes, I had to add another chapter because one of the plot points didn't fit in to this one. I'm gonna shank myself. Also, mind tags xoxoxo

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The drive back to the house was peaceful, Wilbur had the radio turned down pretty low for once and it created a nice white noise. Tommy was exhausted, but for the first time since he'd come to live with the Craft's, he was in the passenger seat. It wasn't as scary as he thought, Wilbur's presence at his side stopped feeling like a sore, and more like an odd addition. It was actually less bumpy in the front of the car than the back, so that was a plus.

Wilbur liked to tap the wheel softly to whatever song was on, and Tommy focused on the way he moved smoothly. Too smooth for someone who took wild turns and aggressive lane changes. Every part of him seemed to contradict itself. The big fluffy sweaters, the manic smiles, the biting words, and the soft warm eyes; his favorite headphones left in Tommy's lap and the complete avoidance of him otherwise.

He curled his hands around the headband of the headphones, he could tell they were well-loved. They were scuffed on the sides, the buttons on them a bit too clicky, and one side didn't collapse in anymore. It was obvious they were something that Wilbur used every day. Entrusted to him, someone who burned everything he touched. It seemed awfully affectionate,

He cleared his throat and watched as Wilbur's fingers stalled. "I don't want to be your brother," His hands held the headphones tighter. "So don't think I'm gonna call you that or anything."

Wilbur's tapping paused fully, and he glanced at Tommy from the corner of his eye. His face was scrunched. "No offense," He started, and Tommy knew it was about to be really offensive. "If you called me your brother I'd cry tears of horror."

Tommy's brows furrowed. "Well, you didn't have to be a cunt about it." He let go of the headphones, turning his head to stare at the passing cars through the window.

Wilbur drove just a bit above the speed limit so things blurred around the edges as they passed. Tommy kept choosing things to focus on, eyes glued to them as they zoomed by. He'd done his best to memorize the street names and intersections, just in case he ever needed to get his way around.

Wilbur shifted, "I don't- Agh, this is not a driving conversation." He said with a sigh, the sound of the blinker falling in rhythm with his renewed tapping.

It was less smooth this time, out of rhythm with the music playing. If Tommy had to guess why he'd say he was nervous.

"No, it's whatever. You made it clear you don't like me." Tommy grumbled, something in his chest tight and stabbing at the words.

"No." He startled at the firmness in his voice, looking at Wilbur who had stopped a little too suddenly at the red light. He turned to face him, a frown on his face. "God, stop making assumptions. I don't *dislike* you." He explained.

Tommy raised a brow at him, "The light is green, and you could've fooled me."

Wilbur cursed, slamming on the gas and looking away from Tommy to pay attention to the road- thank god-

"I'm serious Tommy. I think you're-" His face scrunched like he just ate a lemon. "An acquired taste, that I definitely *enjoy*. But that being said-" Tommy watched as they drove past a minivan, imagining a happy family packed in it. "Techno was fostered three years ago. Things only just started calming down. I didn't think he'd be ready for a new addition to his life." He finished bluntly.

Oh great, well at least he knew Wilbur liked him, just that he didn't think he was good for his brother and probably wanted him gone. His chest stung just a little at the admission, and he figured he should've expected this. He took a deep breath, doing his best to be calm about it. 'Don't make assumptions' a shit Wilbur impression said in his head,

Whatever.

He reached over to shut the window. "Fine, you like me, but don't fucking want me around your family huh? You think it's a bad idea." Tommy spat, glaring out of the window like it personally offended him.

What had he expected? It's not like anyone had ever thought adopting him was a good idea, otherwise, he wouldn't be here. It's like everyone just saw him as a bad idea. Hell, even he looked in the mirror and hated the person he saw. If only his biological parents had the foresight to not have someone like him. Besides,

Who wanted a roach in their house?

Wilbur turned onto the street they lived on, eyes switching constantly from the road and Tommy like he knew he was stoking a fire. "Do you know how hard it is to get a foster when you've just been adopted, and can barely keep your shit together?" He asked, sounding almost desperate for Tommy to understand where he was coming from.

To be adopted.

His blood boiled, and he had to clench his teeth to stop anything rash from spilling out.

“Of course, I do dearest Wilbur,” He mocked. “Oh wait no, because I’ve never been fucking adopted!” He rolled his eyes, trying to reel back his anger. “Besides, sounds like you’re speaking from experience to me.”

There was no response from Wilbur, but instead of feeling satisfied about it he just felt empty. He stared out the windshield, doing his best to breathe through the tense atmosphere. Wilbur pulled into the driveway, staying completely silent as he parked the car. Every second that went on without him speaking Tommy felt worse.

He knew he was angry about what Wilbur had said, it had hit a nerve in him. But perhaps he’d spoken too soon, and ruined what little bit of open atmosphere they just had. Regret crawled at him, something he was way too familiar with feeling and he curled in on himself.

He was brought from his thoughts by the sound of the key turning, shutting off the engine, but the doors remained locked. This was it, they’d leave the car and it would be like none of this had ever happened. Wilbur would take his headphones back, and they wouldn’t speak for the rest of the three months he had left.

Finally, Wilbur’s eyes met his head-on, but to his surprise, they didn’t have a hint of anger.

“Yeah, I am.” He answered, and Tommy felt himself deflate.

Oh.

He didn’t think much before he spoke, and he hated that about himself. It would’ve been easier if Wilbur just got pissed, but instead, he looked vulnerable. He must’ve already been adopted when Techno was fostered, and if he’d just taken a second to think then he would’ve stopped his mouth. Tommy had hit a nerve that he really hadn’t intended to.

“I’m-” He fidgeted with his hands, voice stuck in his throat, the weight of the headphones heavy in his lap.

What was he supposed to say? He was uncomfortable with how hurt Wilbur looked, and he wasn’t very good at dealing with anything like that.

He didn’t mean it.

“Listen. I’m only going to talk to you about this once.” He said firmly, the last twinkles of the setting sun reflecting off his face. His serious expression contrasted with how warm he looked, every bit the image of an older brother. “When I was fostered by Philza, it wasn’t easy on either of us.” He admitted, like speaking the words were painful for him. “Philza hadn’t fostered before, and I hadn’t ever been fostered. So, what do you think happens when you pair a soft-hearted guy like Philza, with a kid, emergency placed straight from his addict parents?”

Tommy took a sharp intake of breath, something potent clawing up his throat as he realized,

He’d seen a lot of kids in homes, but emergency placement was a whole other deal. He’d also met a few kids taken from addict parents, and every time he could only think how grateful he

was to not have his bio parents remain in his life. Some of the worst-looking cases he'd ever seen came from addict dens.

He couldn't picture Wilbur as one of those, but he realized he probably had been.

"It's not good." Wilbur said, like he knew exactly where Tommy's head was at. "And I know I put Philza through hell. I had two years to get my shit together, and don't blame Philza. I was the one who encouraged him to foster another kid." Wilbur reached up to run a hand through his hair, like he was attempting to ground himself in the present and not with the memories rushing by in his head. "I love Techno, there's not one day I regret him being my brother. But Techno—" He cut himself off with a frown, a look so farway Tommy had feared he'd totally dissociated. "You'd have to ask him about it," He said softly, "It was hard. The bit of normal I had developed changed completely, and I didn't think we were going to make it."

Tommy swallowed, the conversation had his eyes opening to the household far too much. He'd never really thought about how they'd been foster kids once too. That they weren't just some happy little family.

He'd been stupid.

"Well, you made it didn't you?" He asked, voice cracking from the alien urge to comfort worming its way up his throat.

Wilbur smiled, the kind of smile that came from a soldier winning battle. But it was the type of battle laced with great sacrifice, a battle that had cost lives and more. Tommy couldn't look away, soaking up every movement, saving every word, and he didn't know why. All he knew was that something in his gut was twisting, and he couldn't stop listening.

"I think the best way you could describe it is- atomic." Wilbur chuckled, but there wasn't a lot of humor in it. "It was an explosion, it destroyed everything Dad and I had built." His smile looked a little brighter. "But then, we all got to rebuild. Philza, Techno, and I. It was better than it had ever been before."

Something scarily similar to tears shined in Wilbur's eyes but he rapidly blinked them away. He cleared his throat, looking away from Tommy and seeming to collect himself.

"That's what I meant- I like you Tommy, but I know how hard this could get, and I worry about Techno and Dad. He's my little brother, I don't want to see him hurt."

Tommy's throat felt thick with something and he didn't know what to say. He was painfully aware of how complex the situation was. He was above water, looking at the tip of the iceberg of the Craft family, and he'd just had to recalculate how much the rest of it was. Hidden just from his sight. There was a myriad of emotions knotting in him he couldn't begin to unravel.

He understood Wilbur, he understood him painfully well. And instead of being mad at him, or insulted, he felt appreciative. And it was so much harder that way, because here he was looking at one of the best older brother's a kid could wish for, and he knew that Wilbur

would never be *his* . He felt it unfurl, the thing he'd kept buried deep, away for years. The longing of a family, of an older brother to worry about him like Wilbur, a Dad who packed him lunches and fought through hell for his kids, and a place where he knew he was wanted.

Wilbur couldn't be his brother, he didn't really *want* to be; but he sat here in the car with Tommy to talk him down from a panic attack. He unraveled himself to a foster kid despite how hard it was, he picked Tommy up every day, watched him interact with his brother, all while bracing for the impact of an explosion. He worried for his family, the one he'd probably bled to have, just as fearful as Tommy had been.

And he'd done it.

Of course, he'd want to protect them.

Tommy looked away, the lump growing in his throat.

Wilbur was amazing. He was an asshole, he was obnoxious, and he was the best older brother anyone could ask for.

"You're cool too," He mumbled, voice choked with emotions. "I guess," And then he swallowed the lump in his throat, gathering himself. "Thanks, Wil." He said quietly, peeking in the side mirror to catch the brief glimpse of Wilbur's smile.

He reached out, a bit hesitant before he nudged Tommy in the arm playfully. "You're welcome, you little shit." He tried to ignore the lingering feeling of Wilbur's gentle hand, the ease in which he'd been shown affection.

He didn't know what to do with the warmth in his arm or the fire in his chest.

His nose scrunched and he turned his head to look at Wilbur. "You fucking ruined it." He said, despite knowing that this moment would stick in his head for years to come.

Wilbur just stuck his tongue out at him childishly, before he unlocked the car doors for them. "Come on let's go, Dad's late again and we're the ones cooking for my poor helpless baby brother."

Tommy did his best to scramble out of the car, trying to keep up with Wilbur who apparently just pulled a burst of energy out of his ass. "He's not helpless." He grumbled, slamming the door shut behind him and trailing behind Wilbur in the driveway. "He could probably bench press both of us."

Wilbur didn't say he was wrong, and a lick of fear stabbed at Tommy.

"Can he?" He asked, a bit frantic.

Wilbur just laughed.

—

Taco's, the simplest thing Wilbur said they could make. Tommy complained about the whole ordeal but stuck next to Wilbur in the kitchen like a fly to a fruit. As they scuttered about their workspace, Wil dishing out orders, and Tommy struggling with even the simplest of tasks, he could almost pretend he was meant to be here.

The second they'd left the car he'd made his decision, he wanted to enjoy the steadiness of this house until he was packing up to leave. Maybe it would hurt, but he figured nothing could hurt as bad as the things he'd been through before, and those didn't leave him with pleasant memories like this would, they just left scars.

"You should cut the onion." Wilbur said, shaking Tommy from his daze of grating cheese. "It'll be good for you." He explained from over the bright green peppers he was washing.

Tommy put the block of cheese down, he'd shredded more than enough. Quickly, he wiped his hand from the cheese crumbs on the kitchen towel, doing his best to coerce the cheese into a bowl. "How's this going to be good for me." He asked, watching annoyed as a few small pieces of his shred fell to the ground.

Wilbur giggled to himself, seeming like he was having the time of his life bathing fucking peppers while Tommy did the grunt work. "Cause you're emotionally constipated and!" He twisted around, a manic smile on his face as he looked at Tommy. "You need to cry."

He slammed the cheese bowl down, pointing the grater at Wilbur accusingly "I don't fucking cry!"

Wilbur just smiled wider, "My point, exactly."

"Ugh!" He groaned, dutifully grabbing the onion from the counter and making his way to the cutting board.

Wilbur just laughed and he paid him no mind. He never cooked much, like at all. Wilbur had been insisting that they both cook for Techno though so, whatever. He cut the onion in half carefully, hoping that it was actually accurate before laying it on its side.

Some of the fumes hit his eyes and he blinked rapidly,

Fuck, it stung.

"You're a fucking sadist, literally the biggest asshole I've met." He said to Wil, beginning to try and cut proper lines in the onion without leaking his gross face liquid everywhere.

"Ever looked in a mirror bud?" He heard from behind him, a probably smug-looking Wilbur watching him fumble with the onion and the knife.

He didn't even offer any help.

Annoyed, he pushed the knife into the onion further to imbed it, picking up a jagged piece of onion and turning to chuck it right at Wilbur's face.

“You little fucker!” He shouted, wiping furiously at his face as the onion fell pathetically to the ground. “I’ll call dad,” He threatened, finger pointing at Tommy like he was threatening something far worse.

He just glared back, hands on his hips and hoping he looked more intimidating than he felt. “I’ll call Techno and tell him you ruined dinner.” He said smugly, a grin stretching across his face.

For a second they held their stares, waiting for the other to back down. As the silence grew between them, so did the smile on his face. Wilbur’s face looked all goofy, and the longer he stared at it the more he twisted it. He knew he was just trying to fake him out by making a silly face. Tommy wasn’t going to laugh and give him the satisfaction though.

Before either of them broke, there was the sound of feet coming down the stairs and there Techno was. He stood in the doorway of the kitchen, face blank and nose rubbed raw from tissues. He looked between the two of them briefly, before ignoring them and waltzing in like nothing was wrong with the particular scene of them hanging out.

“Ew don’t get me sick!” Wilbur shouted. He looked horrified at Techno who seemed to be heading for the fridge. The second Techno passed the halfway point, Wilbur was backing away to the other corner of the room. It wasn’t long before he slammed against the counter.

That must’ve hurt, but Wilbur didn’t even flinch. Techno simply continued on his journey to the fridge.

Tommy snickered as he watched as Wilbur tried to shrink his lanky self against the counter.

“He bothering you?” Techno asked, voice rough and congested from whatever bug he had caught.

It took Tommy a moment to realize he was talking to him and not his brother. He tried not to perk up too visibly.

“Yep, he’s threatening me.” He explained, trying to sound serious despite the hysterical look of pure betrayal he was getting from Wilbur.

Techno huffed, rolling his eyes before walking past Tommy, it was clear where he was heading. Wilbur tried to back away, but he was up against the counter and instead just resorted to throwing his arms up weakly. Techno bypassed them easily, ignoring Wilbur’s shrieking to reach out and put him in a headlock.

“Off me you oaf!” Wilbur shouted, dropping a pepper to the floor as he struggled futility against his younger brother.

Techno, who looked down at him with a soft smirk, just ruffled his curly hair. He disrupted the style with an ease that had Tommy’s heart aching.

They really were good brothers.

It was just a reminder he was an outsider.

He turned around, unable to see the domestic scene anymore, and returned to chopping his onions. He did his best to drown out the scuffle, mind drifting off to thoughts he rather not have. He knew it was stupid to hope, but he hoped that one day he'd have a family like this. He was lucky enough to be taken in by them, but it was only a while before he was back to the bitter reality. He didn't know what he'd do-

"Ahaha motherfucker!" There was a slam and a clatter that had Tommy flinching,

He looked over his shoulder at Wilbur who was now only being held by an arm twisted behind his back, and a bored, but proud looking Techno. There was a dull burn in his finger, and he looked back,

He must've hit it on-

Dark red blood poured out of the slice in his finger, and Tommy stared almost fascinated at the mini waterfall that began to form a pond on the counter. He hadn't realized he cut it, but the more he stared at it the more the pain began to sharpen. He couldn't look away.

"Oh my god- Tommy?"

Tommy was used to injuries, he was pretty casual about them and it was easy to forget how some people really really didn't like injuries. So while he stood there admiring the peculiar way his blood dripped down his finger, he missed the way the brothers had paused their fighting to look his way.

He wasn't too surprised Wilbur had rushed over to him, grabbing his hand and muttering about stopping the bleeding, but the most surprising was the way Techno's eyes fixated on the blood on the counter. He couldn't even pay attention to the warmth of Wilbur's hand squeezing his finger, because he was too busy watching the ever stoic Techno, turn *completely* pale.

And then he had two people in his space, one trying to guide him somewhere and the other reaching for a phone to call Philza-

Wait, what?

"Don't call Phil!" Tommy said quickly, snapped from his daze and back into the chaos of the brothers.

But it was too late, with a quick press of his fingers Techno had already clicked on the contact, and ringing filled the air of the kitchen like an ominous warning. He must've had Philza's contacts in his favorites Tommy thought begrudgingly, letting Wilbur rapidly lead him to the sink. He adjusted the water so it was a gentle stream before he stuck his own finger in to test the temperature. Tommy only half paid attention, focus divided between Wil's shenanigans and Techno whose call had just been picked up.

Without missing a beat Techno spoke, voice deadpan as ever as he said probably the worst possible phone call opener, "Tommy is bleeding..." He looked hesitantly over at where

Wilbur's hand, still clutching his own, was covered in blood. "A lot." And then his gaze was shying away, mouth in a straight line like he was delivering some grave news.

There wasn't a pause after that before Philza was speaking, far too much urgency in his voice, "What?!"

"I'm-" He hissed when Wilbur directed his fingers under the water, "fine!" He insisted, hoping the call would catch his voice despite the distance. Lukewarm water ran over the burning cut, and to Tommy's dismay, he felt some skin catch under the stream.

His focus was instantly removed from the phone call, instead trying to tug his hand from Wilbur's iron grip; who at some point had taken to hunching fully over the sink, practically sticking his entire face in it as he stared intensely at the wound. Wilbur's fingers tightened around his wrist, and he didn't look back.

"Stop, I need to clean it." He protested, not budging in the slightest.

"Oh my *god*." Tommy protested, faintly hearing Philza's rapid fire questions from the phone call just behind him. "Just give me-" He yanked his hand back, the water and blood giving him enough slide to break free.

The rest of the world fell silent as he focused on the wound, a decent enough slice in his finger, and- ah there it was. The flap of half hanging on skin that had got caught under the force of the water, and pulled unpleasantly in ways skin never should. Tommy didn't hesitate, the gross sensation too fresh on his mind to think things through. He grimaced, picked at it, and tore it right off all while holding back the sharp burn of pain that lit his entire finger up.

"Tommy!" Wilbur yanked his hand, looking flabbergasted at him.

He heard a sharp intake of breath and turned his head just in time to see Techno's face drop. "He just tore his skin off," The faintest hint of disgust in his rough voice.

"It was bothering me- I don't fucking like how it-" He was cut off by Philza's voice striking clear and authoritative in the air,

"I'm on my way home, stop the bleeding."

And then he hung up and left the boys in silence.

Tommy stood in front of the sink, just wanting to sit down already, he was annoyed, and Wilbur just fretted over his wound and paid him no mind. All the while, Techno did his best to clean up the mess and biohazard at the counter. He seemed fine with the blood kind of, but he kept glancing over, catching sight of the wound and rapidly looking away. It was a weird sight and it even made Tommy a little uneasy to see the unshakable Techno so off.

Somehow, they all managed to get their shit together. With the help of Wilbur's expert wrapping- seriously it was so good it was unnerving- and Techno's quick cleaning, they had successfully cleaned the, well, crime scene.

With Wil's careful consideration, and Tommy's protests they decided he did not in fact need stitches and carried on with making dinner. Except, Tommy had been delegated to sit silently on the couch just next to Techno as Wilbur finished the entirety of the meal.

"So- injuries huh." Tommy said randomly, aggressively eyeing Techno like he would get an answer.

"Yep." Was all he said before he stood to teeter up the stairs, leaving Tommy vaguely terrified, and mainly perplexed.

Weirdos.

—

Dinner was, well, kind of awkward. Wilbur didn't take very long to finish up, and they built their tacos and sat around. No one seemed to have much of an appetite and that was probably because of the blood that had gotten all over the countertop, but Tommy didn't think it was that big of a deal. Even Techno looked uncomfortable with the silence, and that was saying something.

"So." Techno grunted, eyebrows raising at Wilbur, the designated chat king who was just staring blankly at his half-eaten taco.

Wilbur looked up, not meeting either of their eyes. "So..." He trailed off, looking deep in thought. It didn't take very long until he perked up a smile on his face like a light bulb went off in his head.

Great, he found a topic to talk about, Tommy thought sarcastically, shoving a far too spicy taco in his mouth.

Wilbur wiped his greasy hands on a paper towel, "Tommy got into a tiff with his friends!" He said happily, looking at Techno eagerly.

Tommy stopped chewing, eyes shooting up to look up at Wil in betrayal. "Wht thewf muck? He said, meat falling from his mouth,

Techno, sighed, his shoulders relaxing. "What a relief." He said vaguely, reaching out to take a long sip of his water.

Tommy swallowed, grimacing at the pain of half-chewed food dragging down his throat. He shook it off, refocusing on the two brothers who looked way too happy about his woes. "What the fuck is wrong with you guys?" He asked, feeling kind of hurt. "Why the hell would that be?"

Techno turned to him, the smallest uptick in the corner of his lips. "Just glad you made friends." He explained.

Wow.

"Yeah, Dad kept asking about it." Wil added helpfully,

Of course, Philza would worry about him making new friends, ugh. Tommy swore that man did far too much, it wasn't his problem if Tommy was making friends or not.

Wait, Philza.

Tommy's brows furrowed, he felt like he was forgetting something. Then it hit him,

"Holy shit, did you guys tell Philza I was fine?" He asked, looking between the two brothers who seemed far too calm.

"He left me on read." Techno said calmly, pushing his half-eaten plate away like he was ready to leave. To Tommy's surprise though, he remained at the table, legs crossing at the ankles and leaning back in his chair. "So, what'd you fight about?"

Before he could respond, Wilbur was doing it for him. "He ignored them," He replied with a shrug, pushing his own plate to the side. "I said he should just talk to them."

Tommy stared blankly, watching as the two seemed to fall into their own conversation about what he should or shouldn't do to make up with his friends. He didn't understand why they even cared about it, they were his fucking friends. Yet for some reason it felt kind of nice, they might be fucking crazy, but they did seem genuinely invested in his drama. Even if their ideas were shit,

"No, that's an awful idea." Techno muttered to himself, ignoring Wilbur's protest. They'd been debating for a while, oblivious to Tommy. They only turned to him to ask some questions about the situation before returning to the debate like they were the jury deciding the verdict in a murder case. "He should give them something," Techno said, a big proponent of the actions speak louder than words party. "Something practical, like a water bottle." He finished.

Wilbur, resident, and face of the 'clear communication is key' party scoffed, looking absolutely horrified by the suggestion. "Like that's going to solve anything." He threw his hands up, ever one for the dramatics. "He needs to talk to them, otherwise things will just be weird." He pointed an accusing finger at Techno, seemingly fed up with the argument. "This is exactly why you have like no friends." He quipped smugly.

Techno's lips curled back and he looked ready to punt Wilbur into the sun. He placed his palms on the table, leaning over to look him dead in the eyes. Tommy got the same feeling he had when he smelled a storm in the air. "Maidenless behavior." He said, like it was a taunt.

Both of them stared at each other, seemingly caught in some invisible fight that Tommy had no idea how to see. Quietly, he pushed his plate to the side, eyeing the stairs and wondering if it would make things worse if he just walked away.

Both of their ideas had their own merits-somehow-, and besides, he had a lot to think about himself. He could just-

His attention snapped back to them, watching as Wilbur shot forward across the table in a poor attempt to put Techno in a headlock.

“Holy fuck.” He spat, his chair screeching as he pushed himself away from the table that they were currently *wrestling* over.

He watched as Techno flipped the hold, trying to push Wilbur’s scowling face into the wood of the table. “You piece of shit little brother, I’m *disowning* you.” He was muffled as his face was squished against the table, arms flying to grab at Techno anywhere he could.

Tommy held back a laugh at how absurd they looked,

And then one of Wil’s stupidly long limbs hit a glass, and it fell, shattering loud across the floor, shards and liquid spilling on the wood below. Tommy flinched back, watching as the shards spread right in front of him, the cold water saturating his socks.

“Stupid motherfucker!” The kick was sharp against his side, and he fell into the glass below, hands splayed out to catch himself. Shards embedded deep into his palms, and he yelped as the weight of his entire body had him collapsing on the mess.

He hadn’t meant it, he didn’t mean to, god please he didn’t mean it.

Blood seeped into the grout of the tile below, “Get the stupid kid out of here already!” He was hauled up from the scruff of his shirt, choked by the hem of his collar. It dug into his neck and he sputtered, scrambling to stand up, feet slicing on the glass below him. He gripped his collar in hope of some relief, half dragged across the kitchen.

“You’re useless.” Techno laughed, staring at the mess on the floor.

“You’re fucking useless,” A voice grumbled, and with a hard yank he was tugged through the hallway. Stumbling over the trash that blocked nearly every inch of the way. “You’re sleeping in the damn garage.” It spat, and Tommy could barely plead with it before he was being shoved through an all too familiar heavy door.

“I’ll show you what happens when you’re bad,”

Hands dug into his pants as he stared at the glass glistening up at him, he hadn’t meant to break it. It was an accident, he swore it was. Why was it coming back to him now? He had been doing relatively well, it was in the past. He didn’t need to remember it, he didn’t need to. It was over, it was done.

He was half aware of the front door opening, of the looks of concern sent his way. But he couldn’t stop the scene replaying over in his head, it was a record stuck on loop.

His hands gripped the glass, sweat- had it been sweat or blood?- saturated his hand, causing his grip to loosen on the cup -or was it a vase- the water in the ~~vase~~-glass sloshed as he tried to creep around Lu - no no no please stop- It was heavy, the scent of gasoline, the- justgivehimthewater. Stop thinking about it, stop thinking- He’d made him mad, he’d started it all. Why didn’t he just hand him the fucking watergivehimthedamnwatergivehim bad kid- Shut up.

Reality felt like it was fading right in front of him, his head so fuzzy he couldn't make anything out. He just needed to stop thinking. His eyes squeezed shut-

His eyes squeezed shut the second he felt it slip from his grasp he dropped it on purpose, he let go it was an accident, it slipped. He wanted it to happen, he wanted it to blow up.

"Boys, upstairs." Hesitant footsteps creaking up stair-

Violent footsteps creaking down wooden stairs, dragged down to hell the garage- Don't think about it. Stop playing there, Remember the glass, glass, cold, water there was water in it whydihedoit justthinkabout the glass it's just glass bones

"Tommy." His eyes shot open, vision no longer filled with glass but the crouched form of Philza draped in blue scrubs and knelt in the mess. He looked tired, green eyes shadowed by deep bags, but just as kind as they'd always been. "You here mate?"

He nodded, focusing on the soft wrinkles in Philza's face, the barely visible lashes. "Just tired." He responded, biting into his cheek.

Dontthinkoftheglassdontthinkoftheglassdontthinkaboutglass

"I'm sorry, the boys got a bit rowdy. Do you wanna take some deep breaths for me kid?" Philza placed a heavy hand on Tommy's shoulder, securing him down to earth and back in the wood dining room they were in and not in that cold garage.

He took a deep breath, eyes wide and staring at Philza like he was his only lifeline. He reached up, hand covering Philza's, gripping onto it so he couldn't pull away. He was real, this was real. His lungs welcomed the excess air, eating up every breath he took and relaxing when he exhaled.

"We made tacos." He rushed, leg bouncing up and down as he seemed to run after the present moment. "They were spicy- I'm fine." His chest heaved as his speaking interrupted his deep breaths.

"Yeah, I saw them. Techno said you got injured?" Philza pushed, voice as quiet as he could make it.

"You're on the glass." Tommy responded, ignoring the question. Stuck eyeing the shards that he knew must be digging into Philza's knees. His throat felt thick with something.

Philza grimaced a bit, "It's just a little glass Tommy."

"I broke it." He said, leg coming to a stop and body tensing for the oncoming blow.

"You didn't." Philza sighed, his other hand coming up to brush against Tommy's other shoulder. "My idiot boys did." He said, a small fond smile stretching across his face.

"And If I did?" He asked, mouth dry and eyes bouncing across Philza's face.

His eyebrows furrowed, and he didn't answer right away. Tommy knew he wasn't making sense, but he couldn't help the question. His heart was pounding in his chest, and he needed to know, he had to know. Phil didn't appear to have gotten any insight into Tommy's mind, because his brows remained furrowed as he responded, "If you did, I would help you clean it up."

Tommy's hand removed itself from Philza's and instead, he set it limply to his side. "Okay." He answered, taking one last deep breath. "Sorry." He murmured.

Philza chuckled, rubbing a reassuring pattern on Tommy's shoulder. "Mate, you don't have to be." His hand pulled away and he slowly stood up, knees cracking as he stretched out. "Why don't I get this cleaned up, and I can check on your injury after reprimanding the chucklefucks." He said, more of a statement than a question.

Tommy just sent him a thumbs up, refusing to look down at the ground.

Before either of them moved, there was a loud creak from the staircase, and both of them turned.

Wilbur half stood, half crouched on the stairs, looking like he'd been sitting there for far too long. Tommy eyed the headphones clutched in his hands, the sheepish look on his face, and the barely veiled worry in his brown eyes. Philza shot him an exasperated look, cursing under his breath.

Wilbur's eyes met Tommy's, a question in them so soft Tommy could barely handle it. "I'm fine." He said, probably the worst smile pulling up his lips.

Wilbur just frowned at him, before he returned to looking at Philza. "Tommy got in a fight with friends." He said just loud enough for them to hear before he turned on his heel. He paused for a moment before he was putting the headphones on the banister, eyes shooting back to Tommy before he ran back up the staircase and out of sight.

The only sound confirming he'd actually left this time was the thud of his door closing. Tommy's eyes were stuck on the headphones though, the idea that Wilbur had been there for a while twisting in his head. He looked away and down at his hands, which were clenched in his lap.

"Phil." He said, breaking the silence of the dining room. "Your sons fucking suck." He admitted, but there was no bite in the words at all, just exhaustion.

"I know." Phil sighed.

—

That night, after he watched Phil clean the glass, and got his finger examined he was sent upstairs totally exhausted. Of course, Phil had his own advice to give on the situation Wilbur so kindly shared with the entire fucking household. Tommy just decided to deal with it later as he stumbled up the stairs, not hesitating to grab the headphones Wilbur had left.

They were another pair he probably used, a backup he assumed. They were just like the others but seemed a tad bit older. Tommy cradled them carefully in his hands all the same though, making sure not to trip on his way to the room.

When he got to his door, he stared down at his water bottle, the one that was now placed on the ground fully filled.

They were fucking annoying, he thought.

He sat curled up on his bed, headphones blasting music through his ears and a water bottle attached to his side as he fell asleep.

Chapter End Notes

BONDING, COMFORT OF THE HURT/COMFORT WOOOOOOOOOOOOO

Once they start to tolerate each other we can get to the fun parts. Not that fluff isn't fun, but... Yk, you have to lay kindling before you can start a fire ;)

And boy, am I a pyromaniac when it comes to this story, like my, my, close bonds? what lovely kindling.

Please leave a comment! I love and reread every single one way too often, they really help with motivation and I love to talk to ya'll about the fic. I loved seeing everyone's reaction to Dream so much lol. Next chapter in a day or two xooxoxoxoxo

Hair

Chapter Notes

Just a short one

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The next day Tommy walked into the school like a man with one purpose in life, to make up with the people he hurt. He'd never done it before, but with three whack jobs and their advice, he knew he could cook up something. He had a plan, he walked past his first period, headphones on his ears and water bottle wrapped in his arms. He took the same path he did on that first day, eyes searching out the familiar bathroom door.

When he saw it, he took a sharp turn, steadying his breathing and pushing the door open. He took to the only stall, shutting it behind him and slinging his backpack to the ground. Now all he could do was wait...

His phone buzzed in his hand and he looked down at it,

Wilbur

Good luck

Btw movie night 2nite since dad is off

Be there or i'll make u walk 2 school

He rolled his eyes, a scowl on his face. Apparently, he was hanging out with them all now. Normally he'd say no to such an awkward family thing, but the other night replayed in his head. He didn't want the only thing they remembered him by being the freakazoid that flipped out at dinner and had a panic attack in Wil's car. So, he figured he'd grace them with his brilliant presence and hopefully wipe the slate clean from last time.

Tommy

Stfu and pay attention in class

Btw you type like a twat

He typed out his reply quickly, ignoring the warm feeling building in his chest. The lot of Craft's were a true annoyance in his life.

The first class's bell rang, and Tommy felt his heartbeat quicken. The message he had sent to the two of them had been left unanswered, but at least he knew they had probably read it. He

didn't know if he was making the right decision, and the longer time went on in the crusty bathroom, the more his nerves ate at him.

Maybe this was a stupid fucking idea.

The bathroom door creaked, and Tommy held his breath. He listened closely to the two sets of footsteps coming in, and then the door was closing shut. Nobody moved for a second, and his hope spiked against his will. Trying to be inconspicuous he leaned down slowly, peeking under the stall door.

"Tommy?" Tubbo's face stared back at him from the space beneath the stall.

He startled, shooting back up and ignoring the sharp pain of fear in his chest. "Fuck!" He cursed, willing his breathing to slow down.

Despite the spook, he didn't waste a minute longer. Fumbling with the lock, he pushed open the stall door, coming face to face with Ranboo and Tubbo standing on the other side. Neither were smiling, but neither looked mad either, so maybe he did have a chance.

Ranboo cleared his throat awkwardly, hands covering each other like he wanted to fidget but knew he shouldn't.

"So?" Tubbo asked from beside him, arms crossed as he leaned against the sink counter.

Now Tommy had planned this, albeit not very well, but he'd thought about it most of the night and morning. But faced with the two of them with all attention on him, in the silence of the school bathroom made him clam up.

He shoved his hands in his pockets and hunched in on himself. "I uh-" He sighed, looking up at the ceiling and away from their prying eyes. "I wanted to- apologize."

For a moment nobody said anything, and Tommy wished one of the ceiling tiles would just drop down and kill him already.

"Well-" Tubbo said, voice not giving away anything he was thinking. "Go on then."

"Right." Tommy replied, looking back down at the two of them who had yet to stop staring at him. "I'm sorry." He blurted, hoping he didn't sound half as awkward as he thought he did. "I didn't- I'm not very good at this whole communication thing."

Ranboo shuffled a bit, looking a bit uncomfortable. "Tommy, I don't think either of us were under the impression that- uh you were."

Tubbo just nodded, "Yeah man, you scared off most of the student body on your first day."

Tommy deflated, this entire conversation had gone a lot better in his head. Instead, they were just awkwardly standing in the school bathroom. He didn't think this could be pulled off with the half assed shit he had rehearsed before. He was going to have to free hand it.

He groaned, the frustration of the past couple of days leaking out of him. “Look, I’m sorry, genuinely. I want to be your friend, I just don’t know how to do that.” He admitted, hoping neither of them would realize how vulnerable he felt.

Tubbo’s brows furrowed. “Okay then, just be our friend.”

“It’s not that easy!” He confessed, feeling thoughts he had kept to himself finally bubbling up. “I’m not- I’m not a good person, and you guys are.”

Ranboo took a step forward, a frown on his face. “I get feeling like a bad guy, but you’re-”

“No.” Tommy interrupted him. “I get into shit all the time- Hell, I fuck around a lot, and I’ve done a lot of shit. You guys aren’t like that, and I feel like you’re just gonna look at me like I’m some charity case.”

“We wouldn’t-”

“But you have.” Tommy muttered, feeling the weight lift off his shoulders as he said it. “I want to be friends, but I need you to get that I’m-”

He huffed, struggling to find the right words. Frustration bubbled in his stomach, and he felt like the room was beginning to close in on him.

“You’re not someone who needs our pity?” Ranboo finished, eyebrow raised as he finally closed the space between him and Tommy.

His breath stuttered, and he looked up at him, words stuck in his throat. Ranboo only smiled softly down at him, shrugging when Tommy met his gaze.

“I’ve been there.” He explained, “And you’re not exactly subtle.”

Tubbo stepped up, standing beside Ranboo and glaring. “It’s not pity, we just fucking care dude.”

Ranboo nodded. “I mean, we didn’t know what to do.”

“Yeah, Ranboo said we shouldn’t cross a boundary and pry too much.”

“But we knew something was up.” Ranboo added,

“Just talk to us then.” Tubbo finished, nudging Tommy’s arm with his fist like he wanted to grab it but was worried to get too close.

He hadn’t known what exactly he’d be telling them, but he knew he would have to explain why he’d ignored them. There wasn’t a singular reason why, but most of it did lead back to-

“I’m a foster kid.” He admitted, the words rushing out before his fear could reel them back in. “I don’t like the way people treat me differently because of what I’ve been through. I thought you guys were doing that, so I got scared and ran. Didn’t know if we’d be able to be friends.” Relief filled him as the secret finally was out in the open.

Surprisingly enough, it was Ranboo who reached out, his hand resting on Tommy's shoulder. "We want to be your friends." He reassured him, hand moving back to his side after giving a gentle squeeze.

"Yeah, and if we're treating you weird just fucking say it. So, let's be friends." Tubbo added, "It couldn't be that easy, could it?"

Looking at them and their open faces, Tommy wanted to trust them. He genuinely connected to them, the lunches they had spent together were fun, and they would probably continue to be. Plus, they'd skipped the first period to come talk to him in a shit bathroom, most people would never do that.

"Okay." He agreed finally, pushing away his doubts.

For a moment they all just kind of stood there staring at each other, but then Tubbo's arm flew out to pat Tommy's back, and Ranboo gave him a thumbs up. Tommy couldn't help but smile back at the two of them, feeling the stress of the past day finally lift off his shoulders.

"Lunch then?" Tubbo asked, shaggy bangs unable to cover the huge smile on his face.

"Hell yeah." Tommy breathed, already wondering what shit they'd get up to this time.

"Oh yeah," Ranboo said, shrugging off his own backpack like he was planning on sticking around for the whole class. "So, who's fostering you?"

Tommy watched Ranboo place his bag next to the other, hopping up on the counter and getting comfortable. He hadn't intended to make them skip the entire period, but it looked like he was going to.

Quickly he pulled out his phone, going one of the only contacts he actively messaged.

"Just this family," He answered, not looking up from his phone as he typed out a message. "One of them goes here, Techno. Weird bunch."

Tommy

Skipping 1st can u take care of it?

Btw have smth to tell u in 7th

He sent the messages, finally looking up from his phone to see the two of his friends staring at each other.

"What?" He asked, watching as they seemed to have a silent conversation.

Dream

Dope, all good

You okay?

Skip 7th with me. We can talk then

He glanced down at his phone briefly, sending a quick thumbs off before he shut it off to put it back in his pocket. The two of them finally seemed to decide on something, because they were looking at him again.

Ranboo hopped up on the counter next to Tubbo. “You mean the Craft’s?” He asked.

Tommy raised a brow. “Yeah? How’d you know.”

Tubbo snickered, and Ranboo elbowed him in the side. “C’mon, the Craft’s as in, Wilbur Craft?”

Tommy frowned, not getting why they were being weird about it. “Yeah, Wilbur’s my uh, foster-” He hesitated. “Whatever. How do you know about him?”

“He used to go here.” Ranboo said quickly, cutting off whatever Tubbo was about to say. “Techno is his younger brother, this school has seen a lot of the Craft’s”

“You could say that.” Tubbo muttered.

Ranboo shifted, hands resting in his lap to fidget with each other. “You don’t know about them?”

Tommy shrugged, frustrated because he knew there was something that wasn’t being said in this conversation. “What should I know about them?”

Tubbo barked out a laugh, leaning forward and kicking his feet like he was a kid told he could go to disney. “What shouldn’t you-”

Ranboo without even looking over shoved Tubbo completely off the counter, ignoring his shout as he hit the ground. “They’re just notorious is all. Both brothers were known in school, I wouldn’t worry about it too much.”

Tommy relaxed, ignoring Tubbo who was complaining as he attempted to climb back up on the counter.

“Oh, I guess that makes sense. They’re kind of- weird.” He finished.

Ranboo and Tubbo shared one last look before they were changing the conversation, but Tommy couldn’t help but feel like he was missing something. He’d figure it out another time he decided, right now he just wanted to hang out with his friends. They had a class period to blow, and a million different things to do.

Tommy felt like a weight had been lifted from his shoulders after first period finished. His phone kept buzzing with texts from Tubbo and Ranboo, and he couldn't help the smile that stuck on his face throughout the day. They had lunch together and he got to watch Tubbo make a pipe out of sticky notes while Ranboo stumbled his way through the lunch line to order. Fortunately, neither of them acted awkward around him, and it felt like nothing had happened. By the time most of the day had finished, he was feeling better than he had before.

Things were looking up.

Tommy was excited for his last period, based solely on the fact he would get to finish his day hanging out with Dream and skipping class. Classes seemed unimportant compared to everything that had been going on, he spent most of his time in them texting or doodling anyway. None of the teachers liked him in particular, and he didn't blame them because he was apathetic towards any attempts to get him invested. Mr.Halo was nice though, never bothered or antagonized him, and the work was somewhat interesting. But given the chance of skipping or attending class, Tommy would always choose to skip.

Which is why he wasted no time heading out the doors after sixth period. They'd chosen to meet up at the back parking lot of the school, per Dream's orders, particularly the dumpsters, because he was a freak. They hadn't skipped class together before, usually opting to screw around in class. It was a great last period to have, Tommy always left with a smile on his face. Especially after that one time Dream fell into the tub of developing agent, and they had to scramble to clean it up before Mr.Halo noticed. He'd never seen anyone shove that many paper towels into a sweatshirt before.

He shook the memory off, focusing back on his surroundings.

He stood a couple of feet away from the dumpster, grimacing at the sight of its chipped and rusted blue paint. It was gross at the back of the school, usually, only the janitors and a few staff members ever came back here. Well, other than Dream's group.

He knew they probably did 'deals' back here, and no one at the school really cared much to do anything about it. It's not like it was hard to spot who was in the group, they all had the stupid vans, each their own color and with the smiley face on the brand. He'd mostly seen Dream walking with orange a few times in the hallway, but he liked to stay clear of them. He was hesitant to interact with Dream's friends, and he knew this would be the place where he might have to. He'd seen some of them walk back here, disappearing behind the edge of the brick without a care in the world.

That's what Tommy assumed at least, he'd only ever been in this spot once before with Dream and no one else had shown up. Luckily, this time he didn't have to wait too long, because soon enough there were two hands slapping down on his shoulders. He didn't even startle, just shrugging them off and turning around to face the smug senior.

"One day you're gonna get your ass beat by sneaking up on someone like that." He said, shoving Dream with barely any force.

Dream laughed, shoving him back playfully. "You wouldn't dare Tomathan."

Tommy scowled at the nickname, using as much strength as he could to shove Dream back. He tried to put his hands out to stop him, but Tommy just slammed into him, laughing as he smashed against the brick wall of the school.

They both wrestled for a second, Dream only half-assing pushing Tommy away from him, allowing the other to get out his last few pushes before he backed off. "Call me Thomathy again and next time you'll be fucking dead." He said, no lack of conviction in the words.

Dream pushed off the wall, wiping his hands on his now dirty light wash jeans before he reached out to ruffle Tommy's hair. He didn't pull away from the hand but he did frown up at him, far too used to Dream screwing up its style every fucking day. Once Dream seemed satisfied with the utter disarray of his hair, he pulled away, shoving his hands deep into the varsity jacket he always wore.

"So, what's up?" He asked, falling back to lean on the brick, and gesturing for Tommy to do the same beside him.

He huffed, moving to lean on the rough wall and wincing at how it prickled at his shirt. He was starting to understand that Dream always picked the shittiest places to meet up. Nobody would bother them back here with the stench of old school food, and view of the trashed parking lot. It didn't even look like any of Dream's crew would be around thankfully.

"You were wrong." He explained, nose turned up as he watched a few crows in the grass fight for a limp fry.

He wondered when the last time anyone picked up back here was, and he doubted it had been anytime soon. He could picture Dream's and his friends back here against the rough brick, meeting up in what they liked to call some kind of garden club. He wondered how much fun they got up to, back here with no cares in the world. He imagined a friend group like that was its own family, they had to be with the risks they took together. An inherent amount of trust was required to not rat each other out, and Tommy was envious of it. Like the Craft's it was another reminder of something he'd never had.

Dream snorted at him, leaning to the side to pick something out of his sock. "That's new, I'm never wrong." He pulled out a small black stick, one that almost looked like a long USB. Tommy didn't have to look further than the corner of his eye to know what it was.

Tommy grimaced as he watched him enclose it in his fist before bringing it to his mouth. "I thought you were sober." He blurted as Dream turned his head away to blow the smoke.

"I said I was sober, I didn't say what of." He replied, the scent of fresh mint wrapping around them, only to be blown away in the wind. "Wanna hit?" He asked tilting his vape towards Tommy.

For a second he debated saying yes, he had no urge to smoke really, nicotine had always been nasty. He didn't like the smell of cigarettes, but the vape smelled just like a minty perfume, no one would know what he'd done. But then there were flashes of old foster homes, of one of the kids from the home who couldn't go a few minutes without smoking. The last thing he wanted was to be dependent on anything.

He shook his head, looking back at the now lone crow who stood eating the soggy fry. “I don’t fuck with nicotine.”

The memory of smoke was cloying in his nose, and he was only grateful Dream wasn’t smoking a cigarette which smoke would certainly be much more potent.

“Alright,” He shrugged and took another puff. “So, what was I wrong about?” He prompted, blowing the smoke out from his nose and watching it scatter into the wind.

Tommy relaxed, relieved Dream wouldn’t press the issue. He hadn’t before, but Tommy knew how people could be.

He focused back on the conversation, thinking back to Ranboo and Tubbo who had said their goodbyes to him back in sixth period.

“My friends.” Tommy said, turning on his side to face Dream directly. “Ranboo and Tubbo, we made up, told them I was a foster.” He fiddled with the red sleeve of his shirt, studying him for his reaction closely.

He watched Dream’s jaw twitch and his hand clenched the cotton of his shirt, but Dream didn’t say anything. Instead, hitting his vape one last time, eyes closed as he inhaled like he was savoring it. When he blew out, they both watched it. Tommy tried not to picture what the smoke would look like if it was just a bit darker and filled with ash. As they watched it dissipate, Dream turned to face him, eyebrow raised and frown on his face.

“Huh.” He hummed, eyes picking every inch of Tommy’s expression apart in a way that had him bristling.

He knew Dream was judging him, he wasn’t shy to that look as he’d seen it many times. It hadn’t been the response he was looking for.

“It went well.” He tried to keep the wave of defensiveness at bay.

It had, and he wanted Dream to know it, but mainly he wanted someone else to confirm it would continue to go well. He was happy now, but he was already preparing for shit to hit the fan. If a guy like Dream could recognize things were okay, then Tommy felt like he could believe it.

“Okay, I didn’t say anything.” Dream said placatingly, sounding like he still didn’t believe Tommy one bit. “It went well.” He muttered with a frown like he was trying to picture that happening.

He bit the inside of his cheek, pushing the anxiety away. Did Dream think he was lying?

He crossed his arms, feeling the wave rise. “Don’t take the piss.”

Dream sighed, rolling his eyes before he looked at Tommy in a way that seemed much more genuine. “Fine, I just- I mean c’mon, *Tubbo and Ranboo*?” He asked disbelievingly, hands thrown out in frustration. “I mean they’re-”

Tommy tried to remind himself that Dream was his friend, and he couldn't just deck him. It was hard to contain himself when he was speaking so plainly about his other friends. All he wanted was for them to be cool with each other, and he didn't want to have to choose.

"They're cool." He cut off harshly, nails digging into his palms. "I *trust* them."

Dream studied him, nostrils flaring as they stared each other down. For a second he looked like he was about to argue, but then he deflated, shoulders relaxing as he finally stopped glaring. "Alright,"

Tommy felt himself relax in turn. "Don't be a dick Dream." He looked away, missing the crow that had taken off sometime during the conversation.

The argument was a familiar one, easier to navigate than the conversation in the bathroom earlier. He knew Dream would get it eventually, and it was endlessly satisfying to get his approval.

Dream laughed, "I always am." He shifted, shoving the vape back into his sock before he looked back at Tommy. "I was just worried, I'm looking out for you kid, but I trust your judgment; it's not my place."

Warmth filled Tommy and he had to look away, he didn't know if he'd ever heard someone say that before. He was usually the last person anyone trusted to make decisions, and he didn't blame anyone. But it was nice to be acknowledged for being able to take care of himself. Dream was especially good at toeing the line of being too caring it was smothering, and totally leaving Tommy to fend for himself. He knew when to back off, and it was refreshing compared to literally everyone else in his life.

Three good friends at once had to be a new record for him.

"Wanna go to Starbucks?" Dream asked.

Another thing he liked about him was he was never stagnant, he was probably the least consistent person he knew other than himself. He always wanted to go somewhere or do something, and it kept things fresh after an entire day of classes that seemed to blend together.

He couldn't imagine Dream hopped up on coffee and sugar, but he was eager to see what it was like.

Except,

Tommy shook his head, while the idea of leaving school grounds was nice, "I have to be picked up after school." He explained.

Dream pouted, seeming annoyed that his idea was shot down. "I'll get you back before then." He pleaded.

Tommy raised a brow, protest already on his lips before Dream stuck his pinky out to him.

“I promise, we’ll be quick.”

He really wanted to go, but he didn’t know how the hell he would explain it to the Craft’s if he hopped out of the resident shitheads car. They would know he’d been skipping, and that it was with the worst person to skip with. Dream had his reputation, Tommy hadn’t been at the school long but even he heard rumors about the shit the other had gotten up to with his “gardener club” or whatever the hell they called his group.

But the pleading look on Dream’s face and the temptation of getting to hang out with him somewhere other than their shit school had him caving.

“Fine.” He wrapped his pinky around Dream’s, shaking it once to seal the deal. “If you don’t get me back in time.” His grip tightened threateningly. “I’ll literally fucking break your hand.”

Dream smiled, slapping their clasped hands with his other and shaking it like they were two CEOs who’d just completed a business transaction. “Fine by me.”

He let go, giving Tommy no warning before he began walking in the direction of the parking lot. “By the way, you’re totally meeting my friends soon.”

“Who said I wanted to meet your stupid garden club.” He asked, quickening his pace to walk side by side with him.

“Gardening club.” He corrected, skip in his step as they got closer to the parking lot. “And, I did.”

Tommy scoffed, rolling his eyes. “Whatever sounds lame.”

“You’re not going to be saying that when you get to see the treehouse.” He smiled knowingly, and Tommy tried not to smile back.

—

He did make it back on time, *barely*. Both of them had run from the parking lot, wheezing and laughing as the bell rang and they still weren’t inside. The entire car ride back to the house, he was thinking of Dream’s frankly, tripped out tesla. They’d driven fast to the Starbucks hoping to get there quick, so fast that Tommy had to grab the Oh Fuck handle and pray.

While he thought the drive there was fast, the drive back was worse. He had to balance all three drinks Dream had gotten as well as his own; While Dream refused to let up on the gas and they were racing against the clock.

He was pretty sure Dream’s floor would forever smell like the strawberry frappe that had fallen when Dream had slammed on the brakes as Tommy was trying to hand it to him. In his defense, Tommy had leaned down to clean it with the singular tissue they had brought, but he was being yanked up by Dream who was laughing as he took off; accelerating far too fast at the green light, and barely preventing Tommy from being fucking brained on the dash.

It had been fun, way too much fun.

By the time he had gotten in the car for the drive back to the Craft's, he was ready to do some homework he'd inevitably only complete half of, and pass out on his bed. Of course only after he got to text his friends about how good the mocha frappe he tried was.

Except when he got into the living room with Wil it was to the sight of popcorn on the table and Techno and Phil already sat on the couch.

That's right, it was movie night.

Wilbur was quick to bounce into place next to Techno, stealing popcorn from him and taking up as much space as possible. Phil smiled at the boys bantering, seeming exhausted and ready to crash in his fluffy pjs.

Tommy remained at the entrance watching, feeling something like anxiety take over. What the fuck were the rules of a movie night? It's not like he'd ever experienced a family movie night before.

"Come on Tommy, we're watching avatar." Phil said noticing his hesitance. He popped some of the popcorn in his mouth and gestured to the couch where the brothers sat wrestling.

He was fucked.

At some point in time, in the midst of arguments over the movie, thrown popcorn, and Phil nearly falling asleep; he ended up squished on the couch with the brothers, armrest pushing into his gut as he sat as far away from them as possible. But since Wilbur was an asshole who took up way too much couch space, Techno was practically pressed up against him.

The movie played in the background, but it didn't hold his interest at all. He didn't really like movies. He rarely had a tv to use going from foster home to foster home, and none ever had family movie nights. He wasn't sure what to do with himself, and ended up glancing at the others every so often. Tommy had been too scared to grab any popcorn, but Techno had shoved a bowl of it in his arms and now he felt obligated to eat it.

It was left mostly filled.

He eyed Techno who was reading his book rather than watching the screen, long hair tickling Tommy's side. There had been one foster that had watched TV. As he remembered, the sound of the tv faded to the memory of cartoons playing.

The house had always been filled with some kind of noise, but when she came the sound of the TV had muddled the cacophony of arguing and screaming. Tommy's eyes blurred, the nice couch he was on now melted away to reveal the beaten up and torn green couch from before, the pillows fading into ratty bare bone blankets that had never been washed, and the pink hair at his side turning to thick black strands.

She'd always sat close, the bit of warmth of her malnourished body heated his own and comforted the bruises. He'd changed in that house, allowing her to lean against him, pliant to

whatever little bit of comfort he could scratch up. She had loved cartoons, and Tommy had loved her. Though everything about her would change in that house, the one thing that remained the same was her hair. It was always thick and healthy. He had no concept of family, but he thought she was something like his little sister when he sat meticulously braiding her hair.

He always braided it for her, he told himself it was because six year olds were stupid and she would just get it all messy if he didn't. But he knew it had been because it never failed to make her giggle, even when the whisper of heavy hands beating them down was fresh.

Watching TV with her was one of the best memories he had,

But memories always branch, connecting to ones he'd rather not think of.

The flash of scissors, hands that reminded him of smoke, and a lopped-off braid laying at his feet.

Tommy blinked it away, leaning further into the warmth at his side. He chose to focus on the smell of popcorn, the sound of Wilbur digging into a bowl, and the pink of hair that filled his vision. He needed to do something before his mind slipped further,

Before he could even think he was speaking,

"Can I braid your hair?"

Techno was quick to look over, face unreadable as he studied Tommy whose shoulder was probably digging harshly into his side.

Tommy waited for him to scoff, but it never came.

"Okay." He said, voice much clearer than the other night.

That's how he found himself sitting on the couch next to Wilbur, brain whirring as Techno sat at the ground at his feet, allowing Tommy to do as he pleased. So he braided mindlessly, barely paying attention as he was far too lost in his head. But instead of the past, he was thinking of the Craft's.

They were weird, but he'd known that.

Except with the knowledge he had now, he didn't think they were as much a mystery as they had been. He was stuck with the image of Phil kneeling in the glass last night, of Wilbur's headphones in his lap, and now the feel of Techno's well-kept hair in his hands. He knew he wasn't particularly wanted here by Wilbur, and he also knew Phil had to be the only person to accept fostering him. With most of his records being confidential other than a record of his arrest and mention of a court case, the home had been hard-pressed to find a family to take him. Yet here he was, somehow placed with them and having a fucking movie night caught up in the domestic bliss.

For all intents and purposes, it was a miracle, but Tommy didn't believe in miracles.

He just didn't understand it. Sure, the family was in the middle of nowhere, but he was sure they could've waited just a couple of months more for the home to place a better-qualified kid in their home. He couldn't comprehend it, Phil was a smart guy, and he loved his kids. He would've seen the missing files due to active investigation and would've rejected Tommy for sake of safety. Yet, he hadn't mentioned it at all since Tommy had gotten here.

He also knew Wilbur didn't want him here, or frankly any new kid for that matter. So, how did he end up with them? And why were they all so welcoming, trying so hard despite literally everything saying this wouldn't work. Phil wouldn't have done it for no reason, he loved his sons too much-

Tommy paused in tangling his fingers in Techno's hair, half of it braided with strands sticking out willy-nilly.

Philza gave the decision to his sons, he always did.

His fingers loosened, and the braid fell partially through his hands.

Wilbur didn't want him here, it was a no from him, but there was only one person who Wil would listen to, the only option that was left-

Tommy's mind halted, and the furrow in his brow deepened. Someone had to have been the decider, the one who decided he could come here but- There was no way, was there?

Maybe it had all been obvious from the beginning when he arrived. The small nod every morning before he left to walk to his first period, the sticky notes scribbled out in glitter pen, the seemingly new water bottle already ready to be given away to the foster kid; the same one which always found itself refilled with ice-cold water if left out.

Tommy swallowed thickly, the pieces fitting almost painfully into place. He knew the answer, he'd probably always known part of it, but he was hesitant to accept it. *There was no way.*

Phil wouldn't get a new foster unless prompted, it would've had to be like when Wilbur had encouraged him to the first time.

And Wilbur hadn't thought it was a good idea this time, so he definitely didn't do it.

So, Phil wouldn't have brought Tommy in if Wilbur told him not to.

Unless his other son, the one more prone to the backlash of it all, had told him otherwise.

He stared down at the pink strands threaded in his hands, thinking of the way Techno allowed him to braid his hair in the first place, despite the silly request and tense shoulders he had when they'd started.

Oh .

He looked at Phil, who kept glancing his way with a small smile on his face, then to Wilbur who had easily acquitted his place on the couch for Tommy to sit next to his younger brother.

Oh...

Techno had wanted him.

He swallowed the lump in his throat, quickly combing the hair back out of the braid he'd done.

Techno had shown it from the beginning.

His hands shook a bit but he hoped Techno hadn't noticed.

When everyone else in the house had been hesitant,

The hair was torn from its hold, messier than it had been starting off.

He didn't have to warm up to Tommy, didn't have any doubts,

He felt Techno shift, attempting to glance back, but he hurriedly muttered something about messing up.

Because he wanted him here.

He gathered the pink strands up better this time, blinking away the slight blurring in his eyes to try and figure out where best to part it. He would start this braid again, and he would be much more careful than before.

He'd make sure this one would last.

Chapter End Notes

This one is kind of short, and sorry if I kind of dropped the ball on it. The next chapter is really taking my all, so editing this one is just hard.

Loved all the comments on the last chapter lol, sorry abt the end notes lmfaoo

Push

Chapter Notes

I'm back after this behemoth, it has to be cut in two sorry. Pt.1 is literally 10k tho OOPS and

tags tag s tagsss tagsss because we're exiting the first act of the story, and some tags start happenin

oh and a very non-graphic description of 'tossing cookies'

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy shook, waves of tremors interrupting every lumbering step he took, he could feel his breath slip from him more every second. His ears had been buzzing, but now everything was eerily quiet except for his labored breaths, they echoed in his ears.

He was a pinball, bouncing off the hallway walls with stumbling steps, arms held out to brace himself from the collisions. The ground was too close to him, he couldn't seem to perceive it, the world was tilting and his feet barely caught up with it. He didn't know what he was doing, where he was walking, but the hammering in his chest told him he had to go.

None of it made sense, things constantly changing in size and distance, reality felt like liquid and he could barely keep his eyes open. He could feel the ropes tied around him, dragging him back, but he couldn't see them.

His shoe hit something on the ground, and it was all it took before he was collapsing, but he didn't feel the landing. His world shrunk down to the lone image of the ceiling, and suddenly he couldn't remember how he'd gotten there.

Tommy tried to breathe, but his lungs were stuck together and no amount of coughing would open them up. His chest burned, and he felt the world get just a bit darker.

There was nothing but the sound of his choking, mocking him as the crushing weight of his mortality closed in on him.

—

Often times on the day you die, you'll start it like every other.

Tommy, for all he'd been through, could count the number of times he nearly died on just one hand. He'd survived plenty of beatings, malnourishment, stupid decisions, and even then it was hard to feel like his life was truly in danger. He was too comfortable, and whenever he

was too comfortable life liked to pull the rug under him. Maybe, if he'd been any wiser, he wouldn't be in the situation he'd inevitably end up in, dying alone in a hallway.

The day had been normal. Actually, things had been looking up, and he could confidently say the day had started out great. He'd been feeling good, it'd been a bit over a month of staying with the Craft family, he felt more adjusted than he had in any other foster home.

It was easy to fall into the routine of the family considering the fuckers always asked him to join them. He went grocery shopping with Phil every week, it was some of the only time he got to see the man considering his job was running him ragged. He saw plenty of the brothers, arguably too much. Wil liked to get him to cook with him- but never let him use the damn knife though- once or twice a week, and sometimes they'd sit in the living room in amicable silence. The most surprising though had been his new interactions with Techno, they didn't talk much, but that was just fine for them.

It had been a few nights after the first movie night when Techno had knocked on his door. Tommy let him in expecting an emergency, but he just asked if Tommy could braid his hair before he went to the gym.

Tommy had been sitting there procrastinating his homework for a couple hours, so he wasn't about to pass by a golden opportunity to waste more time. After that it had become nearly a daily routine, Techno would come to his room and get his hair braided, or sometimes he'd just walk in and claim a spot on the floor to do his homework. Surprisingly, Tommy didn't mind it too much, and he kind of enjoyed the quiet company. Having someone else work in the room with him had him doing his own homework more often, and miraculously his grades improved.

His coughing turned to wheezing, his lungs were barely able to expel any air. His heart pounded painfully in his chest, and then he felt something twist violently in him. With barely any time to move, he turned his head, the room turning with it as he emptied his stomach on the carpet below. There wasn't anything to empty, but he felt himself choke on bile, and it felt like magma in his throat.

The tremors were worse then, and he couldn't stay still, the smell of his sick was overpowering and he knew he had to move before anything else happened. He could barely think through the haze. There was a vague thought wondering where his phone was, but it quickly escaped him and left him with the feeling of missing something.

He raised his trembling arms, he needed to go somewhere, where had he been going in the first place? He barely got up, using the wall to support his weight as he slouched over. There was the echoing of laughter, and for some reason it made him sick. He couldn't remember why, but he knew he needed to get away from it.

It had started on one of those quiet nights between them; Techno was sprawled on his floor nose deep in writing a paper, and Tommy was on his bed doodling on his notes in a poor

attempt to study for an upcoming quiz. There was only the sound of led scrapping against paper, and the whirr of the ac.

Tommy's pencil stalled halfway through the drawing of Techno he was doing, stuck on the end of the braid. Sometimes they only said a few words to each other, but Tommy kind of wanted to talk to him. Techno never really prompted conversations like Wilbur, so maybe Tommy would have to.

He rolled the pencil in his hand nervously, "You dye your hair right?" He asked, listening to the sound of Techno's writing slow.

"Yeah." He replied, and Tommy relaxed.

He could deal with monosyllabic answers, as long as he was responding to what he was saying. He rolled over, crushing his paper beneath him and staring up at the ceiling. "So like- you bleach it?"

Techno grunted in response and Tommy heard him scratch something on his paper, probably returning to the essay.

He huffed, tossing his pencil in the air and hearing it clatter somewhere on the floor. He wasn't a boring guy, and he felt frustrated that he couldn't seem to keep Techno's attention. "What's your deal?" He asked, realizing he sounded a bit aggressive and rushing to correct it. "I mean- you don't want to talk but you hang out in here."

This time the writing stopped more abruptly, and Tommy could hear some shuffling. "I'm not a good conversationalist."

Tommy snorted at the response, trying to picture Techno's blank face. "No shit," His brows furrowed. "Okay, but why do you come in here."

"To hang out." He responded simply,

To hang out? Tommy sat up, propping himself up on his elbows to stare at Techno who remained on the floor, looking right back at Tommy. His face was unreadable, but the pencil Tommy had thrown was behind his ear, pink tufts of hair bursting from the braid he'd had in since yesterday.

He looked serious, though he always did.

"You're like- cool with that?" Tommy stuttered, cursing at the way his voice came out.

Techno raised a brow, eyes locked intensely on his. "God forbid anyone enjoy your company." He said, sarcasm laced through his otherwise monotone voice. When Tommy didn't seem to respond, Techno rolled his eyes. "I enjoy your company, finish your studying."

Tommy let himself flop back on the bed, pondering the warm feeling his his body. Hanging out was something friends did, and he wouldn't hate to call Techno one. The idea made him giddy, but it felt like the natural progression of things considering they hung out almost ever day.

Maybe talking to each other a little bit while doing it wouldn't be so bad.

"Where do you get your hair bleach?" He asked, ignoring the work that lay beneath him. "Ranboo wanted to dye his hair, but he didn't want to ask his mom. Tubbo and I thought we could just do it in the school bathroom." He explained even though Techno hadn't asked and probably wouldn't have.

There was the sound of a pencil dropping and Tommy smiled in satisfaction. "You're not going to work if I don't tell you?" Techno asked.

"Nope." He replied, getting more comfortable on top of his plush mattress. "I just thought you'd be the master, your roots never show."

For a moment Techno was quiet and Tommy wondered if he'd somehow jumped out the window, but then he spoke, "I have some in my room."

Tommy waited for more to be added to the conversation but that was all, and his heart thudded. It didn't seem like a statement, it sounded like an offer. He hadn't been in either of their rooms at all, he'd passed by the doors left ajar, and only seen peeks. It's not like they hadn't allowed him in there, but he never followed them in. It felt like a big thing, especially with how he always passed the image of their names carved into the doors. Looking into their rooms felt like looking into them.

He swallowed, he might be misinterpreting "Could I-"

"It's in the closet." Techno cut him off, sounding far too blasé about it all.

Briefly Tommy closed his eyes, taking a deep breath to himself. It wasn't a big deal, he knew it wasn't, but it was for him.

To someone who'd never had his own room, they seemed sacred. Going into someone's room always made him a bit uncomfortable, considering it told him so much about them.

Hell, the room he had here was sacred to him and he only used it for about a month. He wondered if the brothers felt the same way considering they'd also been fostered.

"Okay." He said, making up his mind. "Thanks." He was hesitant in getting up, waiting for Techno to retract the offer but he never did.

He was careful in stepping over Techno and walking to the door, leaving it open behind him in case he wanted to follow, but he didn't. When Tommy got to the door, he pointedly didn't look at Techno's carved name, instead grabbing the doorknob and twisting.

He tried not to be nosy, but the second the door was cracked his eyes were traveling around the room, soaking in every detail. The room was orderly, and there were a lot less things than Tommy had expected. A whiteboard calendar was above the desk, all color-coded, and every pen and pencil seemed to be in place. The bed was made and there weren't any clothes on the floor.

It was all very neat, but Tommy could see the pictures on the wall placed fondly in perfect viewing spots, the few things that littered his room which seemed out of place that had to be Wilbur's. The most prominent thing in the room was Techno's bookshelf, it was huge and filled to the brim. Amongst the books were knickknacks, old sticky notes, old pens, a guitar pick or two, and random shit that Tommy knew just had to have sentimental value.

He walked in hesitantly, tearing his eyes away from it all and honing in on the slightly open sliding door of the closet. He made his way over, trying not to read any of the sticky note reminders on the wall, but catching a few about productivity. The homey aspect of the room was suffocating, and he tried to be quick as he opened the closet.

Of course Techno color-coded his clothes. Everything was neatly organized, aside from the bottom of the closet. Things seemed to be thrown about without care, and Tommy thought it was unusual considering everything else had been too orderly aside from the bookcase.

The metallic corner of a box caught his eye, and he knelt down to grab it. It was atop a pile of things, shoved in the back corner of the closet. When he picked it up it was in fact packaging for pink dye, but it was empty. He tossed it and looked back down where it had been, a few other boxes there. As he dug around, none of them containing bleach, his eyes caught on something pink in what appeared to be an old gym bag.

The bag was open, and the pink was eye-catching, he barely thought about it as he looked over at the shoes in there. They were really pink, shoes he hadn't ever seen Techno wear before. He snorted, trying to picture him wearing them; they would definitely match his hair.

His brows furrowed when he saw how dirty they were, Techno always wore clean things, he'd even seen Techno using a magic eraser on his white shoes the other day. They were scuffed to hell and back, what looked like mud crusted to the bottom of them, and staining the pink was-

Tommy froze, heart stuck in his throat.

He knew what dried blood on fabric looked like.

But there was no way.

Without thinking he reached out, unearthing one of the shoes fully from the bag, staring at the familiar shape. They were vans. Pink vans.

He was in a daze as he turned it over, feeling crazy with himself until he saw what he'd been half-expecting.

The smile in place of the branding.

He shoved it back into the gym bag, haphazardly closing it and stumbling up. Without second thought he closed the closet, bleach long since forgotten. He covered his mouth with a hand, exhaling heavily.

“What the fuck.” He mumbled to himself, too many thoughts to keep up with flooding his brain.

Techno had been in that ‘group’, he’d known Dream, and Dream hadn’t even *mentioned* it. He remembered how Dream knew about the Craft’s when they first met, the way-

No.

Fists clenched, he left the room, taking brief steadying breaths before he entered his room. He knew he was barely present anymore, mindlessly walking back to his bed and sitting down without a word. His heart was racing and he couldn’t help the twisting feeling in his gut.

“Everything okay in there?” Techno asked suddenly, and Tommy snapped back to the present.

Techno was sat up now, essay long forgotten as he looked right at Tommy, studying him like he was looking for something. Maybe it’d been the way he walked in, the look on his face as he desperately tried to process the new information, but whatever it was it had to have caused Techno to wonder.

“Yep.” He replied, a fake smile that was far too natural falling on his face. “You didn’t have bleach in there.”

Techno hummed, eyes scanning him one last time before his attention turned back to his papers. “I forgot I don’t keep it in there anyway.”

Tommy didn’t know what to say, so he just nodded, trying not to seek out his phone which he knew was right next to him.

“I’ll get you some later.”

His fingers grasped his phone, eyes never once straying from Techno.

“Sounds good.”

—

Every time he blinked it felt like he was transported through time. Blink, he was at the end of the hallway. Blink, he was fumbling with the cold knob of the door. Blink, he was crouched in front of it with a hand pressed hard to his mouth. Blink, he was in another hallway- or maybe it was the same one he’d walked down again. Blink, the lines of the wood grain in the walls captured him, racing by him and evading his gaze. Blink, he was in front of the same door but it wouldn’t open. Blink, had his skin always been this pale? Blink, he was in a bathroom he’d never seen before, the light shining through his skull.

Blink, he was on the frigid tile of the floor, boneless as he laid against it.

Blink,

His eyes didn’t open again.

Tommy

We need to talk about Techno's fucking shoes.

Dream

Skip first period

Same place.

Tommy

Fine.

The air was always colder in the morning, and it nipped at his nose and ears, but the fire in his chest was untouched. He'd barely slept last night, barely kept it together during dinner. When he sat at the table, Wilbur kept shooting him looks.

He knew Wil was trying to start something by how exaggerated it was, but he kept his mouth shut. It didn't stop there though. He could've done without the blatant staring Wil was sending through the bathroom mirror as Tommy brushed his teeth, and he attempted to tame his hair.

At least no one had asked questions. Though they would be if they saw him crouched against the brick at the back of the school, twisted grimace on his face. Even when he saw Dream heading toward him he didn't let up, only glaring with no greeting.

When he got close enough, no expression present on his face, Tommy stood, meeting his gaze head-on.

"What the fuck." He spat, hands shoved deep into his pockets to hide white knuckles.

"Look-"

"No." He pushed off the brick and took a few steps forward until he was in Dream's space.

"When were you going to tell me your 'friends' included Techno, asshole?"

There was venom in his words, and he didn't hold it back. He could feel his anger spreading through him, shielding his eyes with red. He felt *betrayed*. And he never got betrayed, because he didn't trust.

At least he didn't think he trusted. He glared harder at Dream, who hadn't seemed phased by Tommy in his bubble.

"He's not my friend- he was never my friend."

He watched as Dream sighed, an expression that tried to be reassuring falling flat on his face. An arm reached up, and Tommy's teeth clenched.

He almost flinched, but instead he tensed, eyeing the offending hand. “Don’t fucking touch me.”

“Sorry.” Dream said softly, hand falling back to his side.

He knew he was being stupid. Dream almost constantly had busted knuckles, he was someone in a group that could beat his ass, and Tommy knew he wasn’t afraid to fight. The same guy he’d trusted that kept something from him that was pretty damn important. Anger blinded him, and for once he was the one reaching out.

His hands fisted in the collar of that stupid varsity jacket, and he yanked, pivoting just enough to push Dream roughly into the wall.

Dream let himself go, making no move to shove Tommy off as his grip tightened threateningly.

“So what, you tell me not to say shit to them about you,” His fists dug in just above Dream’s collarbone, not enough pressure to choke him, but the warning there. “But you don’t tell me Techno is in your fucking gang?”

Dream didn’t look the least bit stressed, like he knew Tommy wasn’t going to hurt him, which only pissed him off further. He wouldn’t hurt a friend, but maybe Dream wouldn’t be one that much longer.

“Tommy calm down.” He said quietly, hands slowly reaching up like he was going to push him off. “I can explain okay? This is all just a misunderstanding.”

“Misunderstanding? I saw the fucking shoes, what the fuck are you-”

Hands wrapped slowly around his wrists, not pushing him away but preventing him from doing anything further.

“Trust me.”

Tommy wanted to laugh, but he held it back. “I don’t.”

The hands tightened, attempting to push Tommy off of him. “I wouldn’t hurt you,”

“You *lied* .” He said, despite the anger in him calming down.

“I didn’t lie.” Dream said, and then he pried Tommy’s grip off. “I just didn’t tell you Techno was in the group, because I didn’t want to scare you off.”

“Scare me off?” Tommy jerked his wrists out of Dream’s grasp, taking a step back so he could breathe. “You’re sounding really fucking stupid right now.”

“He’s not in the group anymore Tommy.” Dream reassured, “He was barely fucking in it.”

“Then why didn’t you tell me?” He asked, almost pleading for Dream to have a good reason.

“He *left* . He wasn’t like us Tommy, he just- He didn’t want to be involved.” He ran a hand through his hair in frustration. “I barely knew the guy, and why he left is none of my business but- He deserved that privacy, and once a member you always get my respect.”

Tommy bit the inside of his cheek hard, looking away from the other in hopes of clearing his head. “You should’ve told *me* .” He pulled on the hem of his sleeve in frustration. “Why couldn’t I tell him?”

Dream laughed, like he’d just said something far too amusing. “I don’t know what he does when he’s not with us anymore, you think I trust him not to rat you out?”

Tommy threw his hands up. “I don’t know, do you? Because you must’ve trusted him enough to involve him in your weird fucking group.”

In a mirror of his own actions, Dream grabbed his collar, getting Tommy to stare back at him. “Do *you* fucking trust him?” He asked, and it was the closest to cruel he’d ever heard his friend sound.

Tommy thought back to all the nights spent in his room, all the hair ties he’d gathered in his drawer for braiding, the glitter pen ink that had somehow found its way on his homework. He remembered realizing Techno was the first person to ever want him, one who continued to want him.

And then he thought about what look Techno would give him as he watched him pack up his room to be driven back to the home. The look he would give him if he saw the released record.

Techno had left whatever life this was, he had a family now and he was different then them.

Tommy swallowed his emotions. “No.”

“Exactly.” Dream said softer, grip releasing him. “I’m not letting anything happen to you, but if you think you can tell him about all this- the ditching- the drugs- then by all means, go right ahead.”

Tommy grit his teeth. “You know I don’t fuck with that shit.”

“Then what are you doing with me?” Dream asked, eyes sharp.

Tommy’s mouth snapped shut.

“I was just like you when I was younger Tommy. You don't have to hide who you *are* .” He stepped to the side, a tone of finality in his voice. “I have no problem with you not doing drugs. In fact I respect it- But don’t play around here like you don’t belong in this crowd.”

“I don’t,” He muttered futilely.

“So what, you belong with the people who haven’t slipped through the cracks all their life? You think you belong with the ones who don’t know what it’s like to have to break the rules to survive? Who have no one else but themselves and the people they meet also doing their

best to survive.” He paused for a moment, watching him closely. “Tommy I knew from the day I first saw you- Come on,”

He swallowed thickly, heart hammering. “Knew what?”

Dream just stared at him, and the feeling of anxiety in Tommy’s chest rose.

“A foster kid placement like you- The look on your face? And that shiner?” He scoffed. “I saw you for who you were- I fucking see you Tommy. And I didn’t flinch away.”

“I don’t-”

“Deny it all you want- but I know you’re already keeping something from them- from everyone.” He sighed. “I know you’re mad with me- And I might even be making the wrong conclusions. But if I’m right here?” He paused, like he was trying to find the right words. “Then you know where to find people who won’t run away when you tell them all you’ve done- People who’ll get it.”

He felt like Dream was staring right into his soul, like he was bared there, sins all left to see.

“I don’t believe you.”

“Then don’t.” He picked up his phone, typing something faster than Tommy could think and then shoving it back in his pocket.

Tommy’s phone buzzed and then Dream spoke,

“You could let me show you.”

—

He felt pressure on his shoulder, it shook him and lit up the rest of the world around him, like a sharp strike of lightning. His eyelids were glued to each other, and the darkness that came from them was suffocating. Like metal curtains stuck together they wouldn’t open, even when whatever was on him began shaking him. He’d been focusing on his breathing, because the sneaky bastard evaded him with every inhale, but he seemed to lose his lungs somewhere in his chest.

“Tommy,”

He could hear a voice, words, but he couldn’t comprehend what it was saying. It grated on him. It was soon forgotten by the feeling of his lungs coming back to him, all too aware of how wet and gross they felt as he exhaled and they collapsed in on themselves.

Holy fuck I can feel my organs touching.

“Fuck, Tommy c’mon,”

More words assaulted his ears, and for a second he grasped their meaning, but it quickly faded. Part of him knew who it was, but that part was buried somewhere deep under the

feeling of the pain and cloudiness in his head.

Something pushed hard into his neck, he could feel his pulse bounce back against it, he moved away.

“Oh fuck-”

The minuscule movement was enough to ignite a burning in his stomach. He felt the painful twist which was all the warning he got before his stomach was trying to empty again. If it weren't for the pressure on his arm, gripping him and tilting his entire world to the side, he would've choked.

He coughed and clung to fresh lungfuls of air.

—

Tommy rung his gloved hand through Ranboo's hair, mashing more of the black dye in the strands. He did his best to mind the split in the middle, the other side remained the usual ashen blond. He figured if they fucked up with the bleach they'd just shave that side off. Ranboo sat between Tommy's knees, balancing precariously on the haphazard stack of their backpacks.

The flatness of the bathroom counter was digging into his ass uncomfortably, but he stayed focused on the hair.

“Are you sure it's enough?” Tubbo asked for the umpteenth time, pacing just a ways from them. His hands were stained with the potent dye, as he'd gotten too crazy with the mixing and his designated workspace wasn't safe either. There was dye on the counter, the bleach applicator was slapped against there as well, and one of the mixing cups was lost somewhere under them.

“It's fine.” Ranboo said, hands perched on his thighs instead of fidgeting for once.

It'd been a good day for him, Tommy had gotten to stand ominously behind him as he made his first successful attempt to ask for an extra sauce packet. The lunch lady had stared just off from his shoulder as he stuttered out the question, making eye contact with a glaring Tommy.

She'd given it to Ranboo without complaint, and they'd celebrated at the table. Tommy found it easier to ignore the incident with Dream earlier because of it.

Tubbo leaned over Ranboo to peer at Tommy's work, Ranboo had to put out a hand to stop him from falling into them. Tommy bit back a curse as Ranboo's head shifted and he almost ruined the perfect line of the split dye.

“Just keep look out.” He bit out, eyeing Tubbo's shaking form wearily.

He would've been the one to do the dye in the first place if he hadn't been so off.

Tubbo stuck his tongue out at Tommy, who responded in turn. To everyone's relief, he returned to peeking out the door and pacing away from them. Tommy hadn't exactly dyed

anyone's hair before, but apparently he was the designated hair stylist now. Techno had bleach and something called toner to give him that morning and decided then, they'd do it after lunch.

They kind of all accepted this might turn out as shit. He thought it was an odd request, but Ranboo had mentioned something about taking big steps out of his comfort zone for his anxiety, and Tommy had zoned out the rest to figure out how to execute it. He was glad Ranboo seemed to be doing well with his therapist, but sometimes he looked at Tommy too knowingly and it made him uncomfortable.

If he got indirect therapist talk from Ranboo one more time he was going to lost it.

"The motherfucker is done." Tommy said, slapping the top of his work and reveling in the hand swat he got from Ranboo.

He scooted back on the counter so Ranboo could stand and look at his work in the mirror, Tubbo of course trotting over to see as well. Tommy felt kind of bashful about his work, so he focused on adjusting his gloves instead, he'd tried to be careful but there was some dye on his wrists.

"Thank yo-"

"There's dye on his ear." Tubbo interrupted, ignoring the look Ranboo shot him.

Quickly Tommy glanced at Ranboo who met his eye, they both looked away, and Tommy studied Tubbo.

"It's fine-" Ranboo began, but Tommy spotted Tubbo's hand curl harshly into his hoodie sleeve and cut him off immediately.

"I'll fix it." He gestured for Ranboo to take a seat watching as Tubbo seemed to relax.

Weird.

When Ranboo perched on the backpacks again, Tommy took his time wetting a paper towel to wipe the dye off. He knew it wouldn't help much considering it had started to dry, but he did it anyway.

"So," Ranboo started, fists resting on his thighs, knuckles bleached white.

Tommy peeked up at Tubbo who had returned to pacing frantically again, and then back down at Ranboo's ear. His heart thudded as he willed Ranboo to just fucking get on with it.

"What's-"

Tubbo's phone went off, and he froze.

Tommy didn't even try to pretend to continue working, focusing fully on Tubbo's face as he read whatever message that had just come in. Tommy thought Tubbo was a decently

expressive guy, which was why it unsettled him when his face seemed to completely close off at the message.

“I need to pick something up from the office.” He said, barely paying them any mind before he was out the door.

Tommy’s hand remained frozen hovering over Ranboo’s hair until the door shut fully and he immediately dropped the paper towel on the counter. Immediately, all the tension seemed to flow out of the room, and he watched as even Ranboo’s hands relaxed.

“What the fuck was that?” He asked.

“See, I’m not crazy right!” Ranboo said sharply, turning around to face Tommy and nearly knocking himself into one of his knees.

Ranboo stared up at him with a look that screamed ‘I told you so’.

“Okay *fine* .” Tommy rolled his eyes, finally pulling the swampy latex glove off and throwing them into the sink. “You were right, he’s all-”

“ *Weird* .”

“I was going to say coked up, but in a bad way.”

“In what situation would being coked up be good?”

Tommy threw his hands up. “I don’t know! I just- he’s acting *off* . All energetic but in a bad way.”

He thought back to earlier in the day when all he had been worried about was his weird drama with Dream. Up until he saw Tubbo in first period in Mr.Smith’s. Tubbo who went from fidgeting and twitching, to completely frozen. Every time Tommy tried to talk to him he was keyed up, and it almost seemed like he was agitated.

Ranboo worried his lip and then looked back up at Tommy, something determined in the set of his jaw. “You’re asking him.”

Tommy’s nose scrunched at the idea. “No.”

Ranboo stood to his full height, still right in front of him, but now looking directly down at Tommy. “He hasn’t even answered me.” There was something desperate in the way he said it, it made him uncomfortable.

Tommy scooted back, kicking out to push Ranboo away with his shoe. Reluctantly Ranboo budged, knocking a fist against Tommy’s ratty shoe so he’d drop it. “You will.” He pushed.

“Fucking fine.” Tommy spat, focusing back on the supplies. “I’ll ask him tonight.” He answered, doing his best to gather the absolute mess of supplies they had and ignore the worry he felt.

“Thanks, Tommy.”

“Whatever, you’re a real pain in the ass when you’re not all anxious and shit.” He muttered, though not unkindly.

Ranboo just shot him a smile.

He tried to think about how he’d approach the topic later when they hung out, wondering the best way to phrase his concern. He knew he wasn’t the best with words, but he had to give it a shot. If Ranboo couldn’t even go all therapy on his ass, then they were screwed.

He never got to, because when Tubbo came back, demeanor completely different than before, he canceled the hangout.

—

“What did you fucking give him?”

“Nothing just-”

The voices faded out as Tommy’s eyes cracked open, focusing on the harsh flooding of light. He flinched, trying to focus on anything else to relieve the pain. His eyes caught on a familiar varsity jacket, trailing up the seams to look right into the green eyes glaring somewhere far out. He followed the red vessels in them, eyes blurring and unblurring on their path. His eyes fell on the mouth just below them.

“Get the fuck out.” It moved.

The mouth was set in a frown, the strong curl at one of the ends expressing anger. He couldn’t place why they looked so familiar, but he felt comforted by the sight of them instead of the darkness.

“Are you seriously going to be mad at *me* right now? ”

“It’s not-” There were freckles that shifted around expressions, like boats lost at sea. “-sober-” Had he ever looked at anyone so closely? He didn’t know skin had so much texture. “-stupid *asshole* .”

The voices raised, and Tommy tried to understand the words, unsure how they worked in a sentence. Between the image of skin, the feeling of a name on the very tip of his tongue, and the rapid words twisting in the tense air, his headache worsened. He clung on to one word, trying to tie meaning to it and missing all the others.

Laughter rang through the air, but it was harsh, mocking, and it had him wanting to cover his ears. The varsity jacket shot up, arms out stretched, and angry eyes no longer in his vision.

Where was he?

“Fuck off! I told you to *trust me*. ”

The same voice as the laugh, the one that pulled at Tommy's memory uncomfortably responded. "Well, I do now."

"Get out."

There was a smash, and Tommy shut his eyes as the loud sound bounced into his head and exacerbated the headache. He was sure there were more words, more crashes, but he drowned it out.

"Alright *killjoy*."

The voice said it cruelly, exactly as it had hours before and the memories hit him like a truck.

—

"It's just Ranboo and Tubbo." Tommy responded, hunched in front of a very tired Philza chugging a coffee at the table.

"12 o'clock Tommy?" Phil reiterated, setting his coffee down and checking the watch on his wrist.

He was still in his scrubs, as he'd only returned for a few hours before he had to be back to work later that night. Tommy could tell work was getting to him, but he somehow still made time to go shopping with him and catch some dinners. Last night he'd peeked his head into Tommy's room, joining Techno to sit on the floor like it was the new fucking living room.

"You said I just had to tell you where I was and when I'd be home." Tommy rebuked, half terrified Phil might turn on him and actually get pissed off.

He just sighed into his coffee. "Mate, you've never asked to go out before, and *now* you want to stay out until 12."

Tommy groaned, half relieved and half annoyed. "I—" The absurdly loud sound of the blender being turned on cut him off. He glared across the room, and right into the kitchen. Wilbur stared blankly back at him, finger pressed firmly into the button on the blender.

He'd told Wilbur he wasn't going to help with dinner tonight. Then he'd been shooting glares at him just like last night, all while he and Phil talked. The sound of the blender was persistent, and Tommy knew it was going to continue well past the time when the food in it was turned to mush.

Tommy scowled at Wilbur the whole time, only getting a mockingly sweet smile back. When he finally pulled his finger off the button—after an absurd amount of time— it was his middle finger he was holding up, right at Tommy.

He didn't know what was up with him lately but he'd been an absolute *bitch* .

"Phil, I'm losing my fucking mind here!" He snapped, hands thrown up as he finally looked away from Wilbur. He knew his voice had an edge of desperation to it that he hadn't intended,

because Wilbur's tinkering in the kitchen stopped, and Phil's attention left the coffee completely.

His mind wouldn't forget the pink shoes he knew were still shoved in Techno's closet, the anxiety about the conversation with dream haunted him, Tubbo's odd demeanor, and Wilbur who had been inexplicably irritable and moody.

It didn't take a genius to figure the household was stressed, and every solace Tommy had found was in disarray. He was waiting for the other shoe to drop, for one of the many people surrounding him to release the pressure by hurting him. Except it just kept building like a pressure cooker and it was driving him up the wall. He knew he would have to do something soon to make it release, but he was still stuck on how nice things had been. There was only one thing he could fix, his message to Dream after school seemed to burn in his mind.

He needed to figure one thing out, and maybe when he fucked up to feel the comforting embrace of pain, he wouldn't fall back onto nothing.

"Tommy," Phil looked conflicted.

"Tubbo and Ranboo are good friends."

Both of them snapped their attention to Wilbur, who was pressed against the counter, a potato in his hand. His face was closed off, but he seemed a little less pissy. It was an improvement from him completely ignoring Techno and Tommy in the car earlier. He'd turned up the volume to the radio any time one of them had tried to say something. Techno had been shooting him concerned glances too, so Tommy knew he wasn't the only one experiencing bitchy Wil.

But now, he looked a little less harsh, his voice had a little less bite.

Phil looked at his son, and there was something searching in his eyes. "I recognize that, but I also don't know these kids."

For a minute Wilbur met Tommy's eye, and it looked like there was something like guilt in them. He didn't know what was going on in the house, he knew it was something everyone but him knew about. Something that had Wil angry, Phil stressed, and Techno shooting worried glances.

"Dad," He said, firmly, and Tommy knew this was about to be an olive branch or a fight.

"Techno is on a workout binge because of a test coming soon, it's Wednesday and I *need* to go because I missed last Wednesday, and you're going to work for another twelve-hour shift. He's going to be alone anyway." Wilbur's voice was completely flat.

Phil paused for a moment, seeming to take it all into consideration. "I'm not going to be able to make sure he gets home." He added.

"Well my meeting sure as hell isn't running until 12, I'll be awake." Wil argued.

Tommy shot a questioning look to Wilbur, wondering why he was backing him up, but Wil didn't look back.

Philza's gaze was stuck on the way Wil's empty hand seemed to shake, constantly bouncing around. When Wil noticed, it was shoved into his pocket. Phil sighed.

"Alright," He caved. "Call me if you need anything okay?" He turned to Tommy, a certain look in his eye. He knew Phil was being serious.

'We'll be out late' Dream had told him. He knew it would be suspicious, but he'd figured if he just told Phil he wasn't comfortable with sleepovers and Tubbo's mom could only drive him back late, then Phil would let it slide.

"Okay." Tommy said, shoulders sagging in relief.

He wasn't going to have to get someone to pick up the phone and pretend to be Tubbo's mom then.

"I'm serious Tommy." Phil said, about as firm as he'd ever heard him. "Be safe, and be home on time."

Wil turned back into the kitchen, seemingly satisfied with the part he played, and Tommy's eyes trailed him.

"I'll haul ass." He promised.

"Good." His hand came up to clap Tommy on the shoulder, and Tommy didn't shy away from its warmth. "Shopping trip this Saturday okay?"

Despite himself Tommy almost cracked a smile, thinking about the onion rings he and Phil would grab on the way to the store and gorge on like they'd been doing since a few weeks ago.

"Okay old man."

Phil scowled and he just laughed. Soon enough though, Phil had stood up on slow legs, to walk through the kitchen and up the stairs. Tommy followed behind, thinking about how he'd have to prepare for meeting up with Dream. When he was halfway through the kitchen though, the rough sound of scraping had him pausing.

Wil was leaning over the counter, aggressively peeling the potato in his hand. He had a pile of potatoes at his side, all yet to be unpeeled, only a couple opposite from them totally bare. His attention was drawn to Wil's hands, thinking of the way they picked up the habit of shaking recently. He could see a few nicks on his pale knuckles, angry and red from where he must have got them stuck underneath the harshness of the blade. The image of the red against the pale skin had something unfamiliar churning in his gut.

He didn't get what was up with him, he thought they were on okay terms, then he'd been pissy, and just now he'd been nice.

“You’re fucking up your hand.” He said, stopping to lean against the island and observe the way Wil’s hands still held the slightest tremble.

Wil looked up at him briefly, eyes as dark as they had been for a week, before looking back down at his work. “Don’t thank me.” He said, sounding oddly bitter.

“Wasn’t going to,” Tommy replied a bit too harshly, the tense air wasn’t going unnoticed by either of them.

It was quiet for far too long, only the sound of the skin falling to the counter and the harsh scratch of the peeler filled the air. Tommy felt himself prickling with how tense it was, far too uncomfortable. The only thing that kept him there was the vague curiosity and painful absence of whatever comfort they’d found before.

“Why are you being a fucking dick?” He asked before he could contain himself.

Wil stilled, and Tommy was convinced he was about to come beat his ass, but then he resumed peeling the potato, this time much slower.

“It’s not about you.” He answered.

The silence hung between them in the air, and Tommy realized that was probably all he was going to get. He wanted to ask, to tell Wil he should talk to Techno, who had been practically absent, but he couldn’t get the words out. He knew it wasn’t his place, it wasn’t his family to deal with.

Tommy bounced on his heels, trying to figure out what to say but Wil did it for him.

“Come here.” He said, and for some reason, Tommy barely hesitated to step up to him.

He stood awkwardly in front of the counter, looking at all the potatoes spread out and Wilbur’s hands which still shook. “What?” He asked, watching as Wil placed the peeler and last potato down.

He wiped his hands on his pants and turned to Tommy, face unreadable. Tommy felt his shoulders curl in on themselves, heart in his throat as the briefest inch of fear took over him. He felt scrutinized under the harsh gaze, all too aware of the tense hands that could hit him at any moment. But then Wil’s brown eyes softened like melting chocolate, and his frown relaxed.

“I don’t think you’re going to Tubbo’s,” He said bluntly, and the quiet admission had Tommy stiffening. “I could be wrong, but you’re a little shit, so I think I’m right.”

Wilbur new.

He didn’t tell Phil, he vouched for him, and he did Tommy a favor. He wanted something.

Tommy’s fists clenched and he waited for it, but Wil just rolled his eyes.

“My brother likes routine.” He said instead. “He doesn’t do good without his routine. I’m sure you know how particular he can be about it.”

Tommy knew, knew from how Techno always came in around the same time, had to have his hair in a braid before working out now, how he was rather meticulous about how he did things, and in what order they had to be done.

His brows furrowed, and he looked up at Wil with a question in his eyes.

“You’re a part of that now,” Wil added like it was simple. “What chaos is it going to cause if you’re not?” He asked.

And then it clicked for Tommy.

He knew a threat when he got one.

“Are you fucking threatening me?” He asked, somehow unsurprised Wil would do so,

“No,” Wil leaned his hip against the counter, crossing his arms as amusement danced across his eyes. “I’m saying this is the last time I cover for you, and you need to figure your shit out.”

Tommy bit a retort into his cheek.

“You would’ve gone either way right?” He asked, not really sounding like it was a question. “As much as I’m worried about you doing something stupid and upsetting my brother, I think you also don’t want to upset things.”

“What the fuck does that mean?” Tommy asked, feeling annoyance bubble up at whatever the hell Wil was saying.

Wil reached out, hand resting in Tommy’s hair to ruffle it, much softer than Tommy ever felt before.

“It means little Toms has gotten attached and isn’t going to go fuck off into the sun.” He pulled away when Tommy swatted at his hand. “Don’t give me that look, you’re really not as sly as you think you are.”

“I think you’re fucking crazy and don’t know what you’re talking about.” Tommy spat.

Wil rolled his eyes. “And I think you’re going to come home on time tonight, and avoid stirring the pot so you don’t get sent back to the home- not that you would.”

Tommy wanted to be mad, he did, but he knew this wasn’t a fight he was going to win. He really did hate how Wil saw right through him, but he figured it came with the territory of being an older foster brother.

“Maybe I won’t.” He said, a challenging look in his eyes.

Some of the lightheartednesses faded from Wilbur's eyes, and whatever he'd been upset about before seemed to shadow him once again. "Pissed or not, my door is *always* open." He said firmly, "I've had a shit week, but I swear Tommy if I found out you've gone and done something stupid without telling anyone you're going to *wish* I'd just beat your ass."

His gaze was sharp and Tommy couldn't help but feel the weight of the words settle on him. "You're an absolute twat Wil." He said, frown curling on his lips at all the confusing thoughts swirling in his head.

Wil reached up to flick Tommy's forehead with his finger, and Tommy flinched back. But his head tingled from when Wil's warmth had been before.

"Now get the hell out of my kitchen, your hovering is starting to piss me off." He said, but it didn't sound like he was joking.

Tommy wasted no time in scrambling up the stairs, feeling a hole at the absence of the other brother.

—

"Dream?" He asked, unable to shake the feeling that he was speaking far too slow.

Hands were at his shoulders, helping him sit up. The world still seemed to shift around him, but some of the fog was clearing just enough. Memories of the night trickled in, disjointed and faded.

"Tommy- thank fuck."

He'd left the house when no one was left, walking down the long driveway into Dream's car which had parked hidden near some of the trees. He vaguely remembered the cold of the car window pressed against his cheek, the soft tone of Dream's voice as they talked about something serious. It all felt far away like it wasn't just hours before when he'd stood in the kitchen with Wil.

Had it all been the same day?

The memories clicked together, and Tommy jolted, stomach stirring. "-time is it?" He asked, heart thudding uncomfortably in his chest.

Dream's mouth moved, but the sound was covered up by Tommy gagging on nothing again. He felt like *shit*. A wastebasket was moved in front of him just in time to empty his stomach again,

"Time?" He asked once more, nose shoved into the wastebasket and tears threatening to build at the scent of his own bile.

"Twelve- Tommy you're so fucked up." Dream rushed, blabbering on despite Tommy zoning out.

“Take me back.” He said, heart pounding in his throat as he tried to make sense of everything.

It smelled rancid, he smelled rancid. He was scared, and everything hurt. He couldn’t control his mind or his body. He wasn’t even sure what the pungent smell was, it permeated his clothes and body-

“I can’t take you back like this.”

He lifted his head and shoved his nose into his shirt, getting a whiff of his collar through the smell of sick. The smell hit him hard, thick and cloying, and oh so painfully familiar.

It was alcohol.

It was weed.

It was his nightmare,

Smoke.

His throat burned with it and he reeked of it, surrounded by something he’d never wished to smell again. Especially not on him. It brought memories of rocks in his heels, glass on the ground, and hands wrapped around him.

“I left for thirty fucking minutes how did you even get so fucked up-”

Tommy’s eyes unfocused.

—

“You brought another fucking Craft here?” He heard muffled through the door, doing his best to breathe through the smoke as Orange shoes- Sapnap, put the roach out in the ashtray.

He could hear them arguing, albeit faintly. From the second he walked in and was introduced to the group, he knew George hadn’t liked him. When Dream had introduced them, explaining that the college student was the one who started the group, George had just stared at him with a judgemental eye.

Dream said he’d feel accepted here, and he wasn’t feeling that friendship is magic bullshit quite yet. Well, aside from Sapnap who seemed far too high to complain when Tommy sat on the couch next to him.

“So, you like the tree house?” He asked, words a bit slower than Tommy expected them to be.

The gardening club’s treehouse turned out to be a McMansion on stilts, Tommy didn’t think saying he didn’t like it was even an option.

“It’s cool.” He settled for.

Sapnap stared at him for so long Tommy was worried he wasn't going to blink. His black hair was tied back by the white headband he had, and his dark eyes despite the red that surrounded them, stared with startling clarity.

"We can trust him."

"You're so fucking stupid, what kind of sick re-"

He could barely keep up with the argument outside the room.

"I think you pissed princess off." Sapnap snarked, reaching for another of the rolled blunts on the coffee table.

Tommy's nose scrunched. "Really? Couldn't tell by the look on his face when I walked in."

Sapnap laughed too hard at that, fumbling with the lighter. When it turned on Tommy looked away, sinking further down into the couch. The air was already thick with smoke, and every breath brought in the smell of weed. It was potent, and Tommy almost thought it smelled good when compared to the smallest terrifying hint of smoke.

"He does that with everyone." Sapnap said, seeming like he was trying to be comforting as he stared entranced at the burning rolling paper. "Wouldn't exactly be good for the honors college student to be caught dealing,"

Tommy heard something petty rise in the other's voice, but he ignored it. He knew this was probably going well considering what he was dealing with. Dream was the one who hadn't told George Tommy would be crashing their 'gardening' hang out.

The potted marijuana plant, which Sapnap had affectionately called Micky, was taunting him from the corner.

They certainly did some gardening alright.

Before Tommy could say anything else, George and Dream stepped through the door again. He raised his brow at Dream who just shrugged. George wasn't frowning anymore at least, but there was a small smile on his lips that had Tommy worried. He was relatively unintimidating, short and lean, with well-kept black hair and nice clothes, blue vans. But he'd had an air about him, one that seemed to demand respect.

"Tommy." He said, eyes roaming up and down him. "Sorry," He didn't sound it. "I wasn't exactly *expecting* you."

All eyes were on Dream, who shuffled awkwardly at the attention. Sapnap snorted, smoke escaping his nostrils and mouth like he was breathing fire.

"It's fine." Tommy answered, sizing George up as much as he was to him.

For a moment nobody said anything, and Dream went to make a move to sit down but a simple gesture from George had him stopping. The room seemed to wait in bated breath as he came to a conclusion, and Tommy was waiting to be kicked out.

“Blunt not to your liking, you want a joint? A spliff?” George gestured to the table, which had plenty of options. When he’d first gotten here, Sapnap had been rolling quite a few.

He figured they were preparing for the ‘gardening club’ meeting, he had been right.

Dream rolled his eyes, shooting a harsh look at George. “He doesn’t smoke.”

“Pick your poison then, Speed? Molly? Snow?” A smirk curled on George’s face. “Smack?”

“ *Dude.* ” Sapnap said through a puff, brows furrowed. “He’s like a kid, he better not be hooked on heroin.”

Tommy shot him an indignant look, “I’m 15.” He corrected.

“George fuck off,” Dream turned his attention back to Tommy, an apologetic look in his eyes. “He’s just being a dick, I told him you’re clean, and-” He shot George a look. “We don’t even fuck with smack.”

“ *Yet.* ” Sapnap whispered under his breath.

Everyone ignored him.

“I’m just being a good host, although I would’ve been more prepared had I known,” George said, leaning against the doorway.

Tommy’s lips curled, and he felt some of his discomfort twist in his stomach. “You’re kind of an asshole.” He said to him, looking at the way he’d leaned himself so casually, yet holding the weight of power.

George barked out a laugh, though Tommy found he didn’t like how disingenuous it sounded. “Yeah, I see why Dream likes you,” His eyes were bright, reflecting amusement that burned. “You’re just like him before,”

Tommy tried not to bristle at that. It felt good whenever Dream said that, but hearing it from George had something him sparking in defiance. Sapnap sighed, holding his still burning blunt out in the direction of Dream. This time when Dream crossed the room to grab it, George didn’t stop him, only watching as he took a hit.

“Are you shitheads just going to talk about me like I’m not right here?” He asked, eyeing Dream blow more foul-smelling smoke out from the corner of his eye.

“No.” Dream said around the smoke.

“Yes.” George said at the same time.

Dream handed the blunt back to Sapnap, who seemed like he was tuning out the conversation entirely. “Can you be at least, a little fucking nice?” He asked, facing George.

Tommy leaned back into the couch with a sigh, catching Sapnap’s eye. ‘I know’ He mouthed at him before he took another hit, and Tommy was grateful at least someone understood.

“I wasn’t aware I was going to have to *play* nice tonight,”

“*Fuck*, why are you so petty?”

“Maybe because you invited someone we don’t even know when I have the new shipment, all over the fucking counter,”

“Like I don’t fucking know that? Trust me, he’s not going to tell.”

“Oh yeah sure, I’m gonna trust word of mouth, when we’re all at risk of a motherfucking felony,”

“Holy fuck!” Sapnap shouted, easily breaking up the fight. “You’re ruining the fucking high I have right now. Just get over yourselves, or get out of the 420 zone.” He gestured lazily to the door, some ash falling from the tip of the blunt and hitting the wood below.

The two looked at each other and Tommy wondered why he’d agreed to come here. Sapnap was right back to taking hits, and Tommy knew he was probably going to finish this blunt all on his own too.

“Fine,” George said, “Dream go get rolling papers, we’re out.”

Dream looked like he wanted to protest but it quickly died out, if it was ever a question of who was in charge of this group, it wasn’t anymore. It was clear in the way George stood, the way he glared at Tommy, the commands he gave, and the way he was protective over the group.

George focused back on Tommy, eyes so black he couldn’t even make out a pupil. He looked significantly less hostile than before, but his body language was still threatening. “You cool to stay, or you wanna go with him?”

And Tommy knew when George’s voice held no give, in the way Sapnap turned his head away from the blunt to look right at him, and how Dream tensed like he was waiting for something.

He knew it wasn’t so much a question, but rather a test.

“I’ll stay.” He said, watching as collectively the room seemed to relax.

He was familiar with it all, distrust, hostility, and he knew how to navigate it, to read between the lines. These people didn’t trust him, just as much as he didn’t trust them. There was no expectation for either party to act like they did, and Tommy found some comfort in it. When Dream left he did so with a worried look shot at Tommy, but he wasn’t worried.

“Come with me.” George said,

Tommy didn’t waste his time, he was quick to follow him out the door. As much as he hated being told what to do, he wanted to win Dream’s friends over. He was starting to begrudgingly realize Dream had been partially right. If the way they acted so easily around

each other was anything, he doubted he could tell these people anything he'd done and get judged for it. Especially considering the apparent felonies going on here.

They walked down a hallway, coming out to the kitchen which happened to be the grandest kitchen Tommy had ever seen. There were floor-to-ceiling windows, marble counters, and a huge fucking island. If he doubted any of them had come from rich parents, he didn't any longer.

George gestured to one of the bar stools at the counter, and Tommy quickly took a seat. The second he realized the chair could spin, he was swiveling around to relieve some of the pent-up stress.

He wondered what it would take to get on the club's good side, he figured he would be hazed or something, but he hoped it wasn't something batshit.

Glass stung marble as George placed two glasses on the counter in front of Tommy, a drink Tommy had never seen before in his other hand. He watched George pour himself a glass, bringing it to his lips to drink.

He doubted a heavy liquor like that was supposed to be drunk straight, but he didn't say anything.

"Dream likes you," George said as he set the half-empty glass down, he didn't seem at all fazed by how much he just downed. "I think he's stupid."

"Thanks," Tommy said flatly.

George studied him a little closer. "You don't know anything huh?" Then he smiled, sharp and quick like he was in on some great joke. "Another Craft?" He raised his glass to his lips again. "Guess things won't be so boring now." He muttered into it, throwing his head back and downing the rest.

He didn't understand why everyone seemed to know that last name, but it was starting to irritate him that everyone but him knew. It was like he couldn't escape it, and it wasn't even his family. He couldn't picture Techno making a name for himself here. The image of him sitting on this very chair was impossible to conceive. He was the same guy who read books about self-improvement religiously, the guy who let Tommy braid his hair, who packed a punch but always picked up spiders tenderly to put them out, and the one who went home to a family that fit him; the one that loved him.

The Craft's didn't mix with people like this,

People like Tommy.

When George looked back at Tommy, his eyes were lighter than they'd been all night. He looked like a predator who'd just caught his prey.

"Prove your worth keeping around." He said, and Tommy wondered if the snake who tempted Eve sounded the same way.

He slid the unused glass to Tommy, and it stopped almost perfectly in front of him.

He looked down at it, peering at the distorted marble it sat on. It was still empty, an olive branch, an offering. His heart thudded in his chest, but he didn't let his nerves show. He didn't want Dream to be in trouble. He wanted to trust him.

But more importantly, he wanted a place to belong,

And if picking up a glass would make him fit in, then he wouldn't hesitate.

George knew his answer the second his hands wrapped around the cold glass. When the liquor fell from the bottle, settling in at the bottom of the glass, Tommy brought it to his lips. He wondered if the image that stared back at him was something he was bound to see. If the taste that gripped his senses was one he'd never get rid of.

When it burned down his throat and scorched his nose, he wondered if every family started with the sting of pain and echo of fire.

Did acceptance come with the price of laughter and loss of control?

Was he fated to breathe the heat of smoke in his lungs? Feel it find a path in place of oxygen like it always belonged there instead.

Did home feel like losing yourself in the haze? Was it found in lips that spilled secrets like they spilled smoke?

Was his strength found at the other end of the bottle? Was he saving himself by becoming like those who'd hurt him before?

Or maybe was it in a pill?

He didn't know any of the answers,

But he did know that for the first time in his life, he'd fully lost grip of what had haunted him since his birth; reality.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for all the support you guys! It keeps me going, I'm so happy we're so far into this alrdy, i didnt think id be able to write so many words. It makes me so happy I've got people coming with me on this ride of a story, seeing familiar faces in the comments warms my heart, like ya'll still reading this??? cying. /positive

I honestly didn't think I could pull this plot off but IM DOING IT ANYWAYYY.

I'm so excited to enter the next act and finally get some of the shit that's been planted to start fucking happening. I basically have everything planted and mapped out for every

character's 'arc',

So let me know what ya'll think!! The brothers are finally bonding T^T
they will be brothers.

Push (con.)

Chapter Notes

its gets worse b4 it gets better

it gets worse b4 it gets better plz guys plz im sorryry

I broke my 3rd computer charger since i started this fic and im losing it right now ordered a new one but it comes in a few days and my computer is running out of battery literally right now so barely had time to edit this at all

I BEEN SPEED RUNNING THIS SHIT FR IM TYPIN THIS SO FAST SO I CAN POST B4 MY COMPUTER LITERALLY SHUTS OFF

A WHOLE NOTHER 10K SOMEONE STOP ME, loved all the comments last chapter too omfhgfv re anyway enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The thing they don't tell you about finally escaping reality is that when it catches up to you, it's crushing.

When you're born, you experience your first trauma, the sudden assault of taking your first breath. You cry for help because you don't understand anything, you're ripped from the perfect comfort, stolen from the euphoric feeling of nothing. Brought into the world in confusion and pain.

When the drink leaves you, and the high starts to fade, the clouds part, and you're stolen from the euphoric feeling of nothing. You take your first breath again on the bathroom floor, you cry for help because you don't understand. It's exactly the same, except this time there's no doctors to hold you, no parent to welcome you.

Tommy wished someone had told him that, because then maybe he'd never have tried it.

Everything hurt, he couldn't piece together his memories, and he was sure that a lot of it was left blank. He couldn't stop throwing up for a while, he couldn't tell if he was throwing up because of the alcohol, or if it was just because of the onslaught of reality.

"I want to go back," He begged, shaking as Dream did his best to hold him up against the toilet.

"You're way too fucked up for that, you can barely stand." He responded, hand returning to the side of Tommy's neck to check his pulse. "Fuck, I never should've left." He muttered.

“Where’s my phone? I can’t- I can’t remember anything.” He swallowed the lump in his throat, trying to breathe through nausea rolling through him.

“Kid, you need to breathe, your pulse is all out of whack,” Dream said, looking around the bathroom for something. “You’re so fucking lucky you’re even awake right now, I don’t know how much you’ve done,”

Tommy groaned, his head hitting the cold porcelain of the toilet as he screwed his eyes shut to focus on breathing. He knew he was probably having a panic attack, and a panic attack while being shit-faced was on a whole other level. Somewhere between deep breaths, the door opened and he could feel Dream stiffen beside him.

“Oh shit-” There was a slurred laugh, “George was right, kid’s *fucked* .”

“Shut up, and shut the damn door.” Dream hissed to the person, and the door clicked shut again.

A shadow fell over Tommy, and from the corner of his eye, he could see orange vans against the tile. He shut his eyes again and prayed it would be over soon.

“I brought his phone, left it on the couch,” He figured Sapnap was passing it off to Dream and didn’t bother to involve himself.

“Do you know what he took?” Dream pressed, “How much?”

“Nah, c’mon dude, I didn’t have time to babysit.”

There was a huff of breath and then pressure at Tommy’s side. He flinched, eyes shooting open to look over at Sapnap, who crouched right against his side. His eyes were bloodshot to hell and back, and they were unnervingly close to his face.

Dream’s grip on Tommy’s back tightened and it was almost painful for a moment, “What are you doing?”

“Chill.” Sapnap said, “I just wanted to see how the little buddy was doing.” His head tilted like he was examining him, and Tommy did his best to scowl despite not being able to feel his face. “Just some advice, when you’re crossfaded and it starts to fade like this? You feel how much it hurts, how hard it is to wake up?” His lips curled into a smile, “You do more, and you delay that shit longer.”

It was only a second before Dream’s arm shot out and he pushed Sapnap over, “What the fuck? You let him get fucking *crossfaded* ?” He sounded more pissed than Tommy had ever heard him.

Sapnap moved to sit up, laughing, “I didn’t do shit- Mothefucker was fun as fuck when-”

He felt like he was fucking dying.

Tommy turned just in time to throw up in the toilet, head spinning wildly and insides twisting violently. He was freezing, his head pounded, and he could barely open his eyes because the

room wouldn't stop moving. He felt like he couldn't breathe and his heart would just stop.

"Please take me back," He groaned, for the first time in months there were tears pricking in his eyes and he refused to give in now. "Please Dream,"

Dream's hand reached out to land on his back, "Hell no." He said firmly. "Not like this, neither of us are in a state to bring you back to the Craft's like this."

He thought of the comfort of a braid in his hand, dinner at the table, nights spent in the living room, headphones held to his ears, and warm brown eyes telling him they were waiting. He wanted to leave, he wanted to feel safe. He didn't want to be kicked out yet.

With a shaking arm he shoved the hand back, teeth grit so hard his face hurt. "I need to go right now," He stared at Dream through blurry vision, room swaying and body shaking just as violently.

"Take me, fucking home."

—

At some point when he'd heaved outside the open window, head lolling back into the car after to breathe in the fresh AC, Dream's demeanor changed. The car ride had been tense anyway, but even disoriented as he was Tommy could tell the look Dream was shooting him wasn't a good one. The tapping on his steering wheel was grating and out of rhythm, it made him think of Wil.

"Can you fucking stop that?" He asked, every tap on the wheel felt like a harsh tap on his skull.

Dream's hands tightened on the wheel, knuckles bleaching white as he gripped the black leather. "Why did you do that shit?"

"Excuse me?" Tommy asked, wiping sweat from his brow and turning to face the other.

Dream didn't look at him, staring resolutely at the empty road ahead, the car drifting in and out of the lane. "Why did you get fucked up." When he finally turned to glance at him there was a scowl on his face. "Said you wouldn't do that shit, If I had known I wouldn't have—" he cut himself off, looking away. "Whatever. Guess it was a lie."

Tommy took a second to process the words, jaw clenching as they finally registered. "Are *you* mad at *me* right now?" He asked, aghast.

Dream huffed out a harsh breath, "Yeah, well I come back and you're gone, and no one knows where you are. Then I come to find you fucking passed out on the bathroom floor—" He took a turn a bit harsher than usual, speeding onto the entrance ramp. "So what the fuck were you thinking?"

The tone Dream used was accusatory, like it was all his fault they ended up in this situation.

Tommy's hand dug into his seatbelt, and his nostrils flared as a wave of heat hit him. "You fucking asshole- Maybe you should've fucking thought when you left me alone for hours."

"I had to get rolling papers, you could've come with,"

"Could I have?" He rebuked, glaring at Dream. "Why the hell did getting them take hours in the first place?"

The hands on the wheel tightened further. "There was traffic."

Tommy laughed, it wasn't even funny, but he laughed so hard and long he had to roll the window back down in case he threw up. "I'm not fucking stupid- Traffic, seriously? You're actually full of shit." The air rushing past his face contrasted pleasantly with the flames of anger licking at his nerves, and he leaned further out the window, hoping to find more relief.

"Tommy stop!" There was a hand knotting in his collar, and before he could lean out further he was yanked back, choking on the shirt pressing into his throat. "Get back in! are you trying to fucking die?"

Without a thought he reached back to grab at the hand, nails digging into it in hopes it would release and stop the flood of memories of being dragged down garage stairs. The memory was more vivid than it had ever been, the smell of alcohol just the same as it was before when he was dragged and tossed to the floor.

"Let go!" He shouted.

Dream yanked his hand back with a curse, and the car swerved and had Tommy rolling along with it.

His hand came back bloody, and the bright red flush against his pale skin had him coming back to the present.

"Holy shit, you're fucking crazy." Dream righted the car, returning to the proper lane on the freeway. "What the fuck Tommy! I'm not taking you back to them like this."

"You're just saying that because you don't want to get in shit, for taking a fifteen-year-old into a fucking drug lair!" He spat, adjusting his collar so it would feel less like it was choking him.

Dream laughed, "Oh so it's my fault? I'm not the fucking idiot who got absolutely shit-faced with no tolerance!"

"I wouldn't have had to if you didn't leave!" He rebuked.

"You decided to come, *you* decided to drink."

Tommy could barely contain his anger, and blood smeared on his shirt as he clenched his hand into the fabric. "Don't act like being sober there was an option. Not when George didn't trust me!"

“I’m done with this conversation Tommy. You’re drunk and unreasonable.” Dream snapped, sounding nothing like the friend Tommy knew. “I’m not fucking taking you home.”

He should’ve noticed the tone in Dream’s voice, how he’d done a 180 from his usual personality, the way he barely had control of his anger or even his own car. He didn’t notice it though, all he noticed was the fire building in his stomach when he heard the blinker turn on.

They weren’t anywhere near his exit.

Tommy twisted in his seat to face him, watching the world twist with him. “Turn this car around, I fucking dare you.”

“I will, you’re not going home.” Dream said.

Tommy reached forward, fumbling in his seat as he tried to reach over to put the blinker off. Dream didn’t hesitate, harshly shoving him back.

“Don’t touch my fucking shit.” He snapped, hand fisting Tommy’s shirt as he pushed him far back and held him down.

“Take me fucking home!” Tommy exploded. “Where the fuck are taking me?”

Dream released him after Tommy shoved his hand off, “Tommy shut the fuck up! It doesn’t fucking matter where, I’m not taking you back.” His hand returned to the wheel and his jaw clenched. “Don’t fucking test me right now, you’re seriously pissing me off.”

There was something in his tone, in his posture that would have anyone backing off. But not Tommy.

They were approaching an exit fast and Dream had already moved from the far left to the middle lane to get off. Fear clutched at him and despite any logical thought, he didn’t stay quiet.

“Turn the car around, Dream, watch what happens.” Tommy said again, “I fucking *dare* you.”

The minuscule clench in Dream’s jaw, and the flash of anger searing in his green eyes was all warning he got before the brake was slammed and he shot forward. The seatbelt tightened against his chest painfully, and it was the only thing that prevented his head from slamming into the dashboard.

When they came to a full stop he gasped, trying to regain the air that forcefully escaped him. His stomach rolled painfully, and he looked out the window, crushed by the sudden realization the car had come to a complete stop in the middle of the freeway. His seatbelt was locked against him, and he could barely move; without a second thought he fumbled with it to unclick it.

“What the fuck?” He asked, breaths coming through short. “What the fuck- Dream what the fuck!” He looked at Dream who’s face was completely shut off, staring right back at him with subtle anger that shot terror deep into him.

When Dream spoke, he sounded far too calm. “You want me to turn around? I can turn the fuck around.”

Tommy felt ice in his veins, fear so sharp his whole body tensed. “You’re psychotic.” He turned his head around, looking frantically through the windows and mirrors to see if any cars were about to come speeding down the freeway. “We’re going to get fucking hit!” His heart hammered in his throat. Facing the sudden jarring reality that the friend he’d just been joking with in class earlier that day was now totally off his rocker.

Then it hit him. “Shit Dream- shit! You’re high aren’t you? Move the motherfucking car!”

He turned to look back at Dream, fully panicked now. It was just now he was seeing the bloodshot eyes, but he couldn’t smell any alcohol on his breath. He knew there’d been pills, cocaine, so much shit at the house, but he hadn’t stopped to think if Dream had taken anything. He was faced with sudden regret.

“You’re the one who asked me to take you home.” Like he was coming alive again, anger filled Dream’s face and he was scowling at him, slamming his bleeding hand into the wheel. “You don’t fucking think Tommy!”

Panic morphed into anger and Tommy was reaching across the console, shoving into Dream. “Move the fucking car!” He shouted, hands knotted into Dream’s jacket like he could force him to step on the gas. “Do you want us to die? We’re in the middle of the damn freeway!”

Dream fought his hands off, trying to shove Tommy back in his seat. “You would’ve fucking died if I hadn’t gotten your dumbass off the fucking bathroom floor! Why the fuck would you drink like that?”

“You left!” He shouted back, eyes seeing nothing but red. “You fucking left me there for hours, what the fuck else was I going to do? George pressured me.”

Dream laughed manically, still trying to push Tommy off him, “You made that fucking choice! No one picks up a fucking glass for you, you drank it!”

It was almost hilarious how absurd the situation was, that they sat there in one of the most dangerous situations and they were arguing about something entirely unrelated. He felt the familiar hum created only by a concoction of adrenaline, fear, and anger. It was like coming alive, and he couldn’t stop the flames.

Anger clouded him, impulsivity from the drinks still fucking with his head. “I hate you!” He slapped Dream’s chest, shoving him so harshly that he slammed into the window. “You’re fucking insane!”

Dream wouldn’t stop laughing, like he wasn’t even sure what was going on either. “I’m sorry but you did this,” He said, a twisted smile on his face, “You dared me too.”

Tommy could barely restrain himself from yelling, but he kept glancing in the rearview, heart in his chest. Looking at Dream was like staring in a mirror, and he didn’t want to know the image Dream was seeing.

What the fuck were they doing?

He spotted headlights further down the freeway, and his heart stopped. All-encompassing terror clawing up his throat and choking him. “Dream- the car! We’re going to get hit!” Dream didn’t even look back at the fast-approaching lights, he was still smiling, and Tommy felt a fire start underneath him.

“Make me move,” He taunted, words lighting the match and dropping them into Tommy’s already active flames.

They were going to fucking die. He was going to *die* . Just like last time.

Headlights lit up the interior of the car, and he knew it would be over soon.

“Cmon Tommy, what are you going to do?” His hands were on Tommy, pushing him back.

He wouldn’t die here.

Not with Dream’s stupid fucking smile being the last thing he saw. Not after everything he’d done to survive.

Fire exploded, and Tommy shook with rage.

Before he could think,

He reached out and punched Dream right in the nose, feeling the bone shift under his fist. “Move!” He screamed.

Dream’s hand grabbed his wrist, twisting into it and slamming it on the console with bruising force. Blood dribbled down his lip and hooked on his smile, eyes lit with the same fire Tommy had.

Tommy only had a moment of peace before he was being slammed into the dashboard, rubber screeching on asphalt as Dream pressed the gas pedal to the floor, and they went from 0 miles an hour to 60 in two breakneck seconds.

The car jerked and flew into the other lane, blaring honk screeching by them as the car in the lane they were once in sped past them, narrowly avoiding the collision. With his free hand, Tommy clutched the dash, heart hammering as he braced for impact. Dream’s grip on him was almost a comfort in the chaos, preventing the both of them from getting lost in the flame.

The car sped far past them, and they were in the clear.

Dream released his wrist, other hand returning to the wheel. “Get in your damn seat.” He said, and Tommy didn’t hesitate, crazed laugh stuttering from his chest.

That had almost been it. What the fuck had just happened?

“Holy shit,” He said, shaking from adrenaline and the high of exhilaration. “We almost fucking died- You’re batshit!”

Dream smiled sharp, blood glinting off his otherwise white teeth, “So are you.”

Tommy rode the high of his adrenaline, knowing it would fade and leave nothing but fear and panic in its wake. “I hate you so fucking much right now, I’m *so* mad at you.” He said, despite the giddy feeling of surviving in his chest.

“I know, me too.” Dream replied, hand reaching up to brush the blood off his face.

Tommy was dead silent, processing the fact that he was still alive and not squished between the crushed metal. Neither of them said anything, and he figured Dream was probably thinking the same thing. He didn’t know whether to laugh or cry.

Then randomly, the silence was broken,

“I’m sorry,” Dream said, quieter than he’d been all night, sounding genuine. “Think we both had too much tonight.”

“You’re sick.” He said, but he couldn’t shake the thought that he might be a little sick too.

Tommy gave himself five minutes before he sobered up a little more and reality hit him and he wallowed in regret and fear, but he’d cherish the five minutes of relief.

When it hit, he would end up rolling down the window to get enough air to breathe through the hyperventilating. Dream would pat his back with a bloody hand, and he’d scream his frustration into the wind after slapping the hand away.

—

Later, when the car ride was over, he would thank the gods that Phil wasn’t home, that he had a shift so long, but in that moment he could barely do anything. The fun part of the high and drunk was all gone, and all that was left was pain, and sick.

He knew he’d done too much, and his body felt like it was fucking dying. Worse were the mood swings as his muddled brain tried to process the night and his anger towards Dream. His hand ached with bruises on his wrist, and the cut on his knuckle from where he’d punched Dream. He didn’t know if the guilt would win over the anger, or if he would continue flashing between the two.

Even in his state, he still managed to argue with Dream all the way through the car ride. They’d sat in silence for a while before Dream had tried apologizing again, and it led to another argument. He knew both of them were too emotional to think straight, but it didn’t stop them from ripping into each other.

He couldn’t forget the icy chill of fear when Dream had stopped the car, or the hand that pulled on his collar and awoken far too many memories.

When they pulled up in the driveway, it was no different, but by then Tommy was tired of hearing the bullshit bounce back and forth. Some of his senses were coming back to him, and the regret and fear stung deep.

He'd fucked up massively, and he knew when he was sober he wouldn't even recognize himself.

They sat in the driveway arguing for too long, and Tommy just couldn't do it anymore.

"Seriously Tommy, I need to make sure you're okay- You can just stay over and I can help with this."

He turned around in his seat, fire lighting as he glared at Dream. "I don't want your fucking help Dream." He snarled, in far too much pain and distress to deal with the argument. "I said no, If you wanted to help me you wouldn't have fucked off in the first place- or I don't know, tried to kill us!"

"Tommy I-"

"You're just as fucked up as I am! I don't know why you're so fucking mad I drank, but clearly being high or whatever is wrong with you isn't any better." He was tired of it all, he was *late*, and this whole thing was probably going to get him kicked out.

He thought he'd been doing good in this house, that maybe it'd be different, but it wasn't, because he was no different than the kid who sat in cuffs just months before.

Dream groaned in frustration, "God you're infuriating!" He sighed like he realized he was being a dick and Tommy felt like they were talking in circles. "I'm sorry, I just assumed you wouldn't be so fucking stupid and-"

He could say he was mad at Dream, but he was more upset with himself. No matter where he went, he couldn't escape who he was. He was no better than a pest, a roach.

He was done with the night.

"Just fuck off."

He fumbled with the car door, drowning out whatever Dream was saying and pushing the weight of the door open. Part of him wasn't all there, he couldn't stop shaking, and he felt like he was moving through molasses. He couldn't perceive how far the door was, or how close the ground was. But still, he could manage to make his way out of the car, stumbling toward the house after he kicked the door shut.

Fuck Dream, and fuck everything.

He hated who he was, and he didn't know how to fix any of it.

Time still moved all whacky, he didn't know how long it took to get in the house and tread up the stairs. He was lost in his head, stuck with the terrifying finality of the idea that he was the problem, and he didn't know where to begin with that. He knew at some point he'd paused on

the stairs, crawling up them because he kept swaying a bit too much for comfort. If he wasn't in so much pain he probably would've fallen asleep there, but he just caught his breath and hoped his heart would stop stuttering.

When he got to the top of the steps he stood, leaning against the wall for support. He hated himself, why had he done this? Why did he think it was a good idea? His eyes screwed shut and he struggled with his breathing. Dream was right. He was fucking stupid.

He wasn't going to be able to sleep, not with having to ride out the effects that seemed never-ending.

But his thoughts wouldn't stop either.

Tommy was scared, his mind was still foggy, and he knew he was going to fuck up more somehow. He couldn't think straight but he wanted to. If he knew what to do in a situation like this, then maybe it would help, but he didn't. It felt like if he didn't do something soon his body would give out, and he was terrified. He didn't even know if he deserved the right to be terrified.

He couldn't even remember all he'd taken, but he hoped it was just weed and drinks.

He needed help, and the pit in his stomach, the one exacerbated by the consuming silence, it was growing.

He didn't want to be alone, he was scared of himself, of what he could do. Or worse, if Dream decided to come back and fly off the handle again.

The smile on Dream's face as that car approached flashed in his brain again, and he felt true horror. That hadn't been Dream, whoever that was hadn't been his friend.

He took one look down the hall, scanning Techno's shut door, and then Wilbur's, eyeing the warm light that peeked from the crack at the bottom.

He wanted help, he wanted Wil. But he knew he didn't deserve it. There was blood on his hand, bruising on his wrist, and probably on his chest, he knew that some blood must've gotten on his shirt as well, and his face probably looked like a wreck. He couldn't bother anyone, he never deserved comfort before.

But he wasn't thinking right, and he was spoiled with knowing what comfort felt like now. The feeling of Phil wrapping his foot, Techno filling up his water bottle, and Wil somehow always knowing when he needed help.

Wilbur was going to end up checking on him anyway, he'd stayed up for him, and if Tommy had looked at his phone earlier he would've seen the missed calls and messages.

He made his decision.

Tommy didn't think over the panic attack, couldn't quite control what he did. One minute he was huddled against the wall, and the next he was knocking on the door he'd never touched before.

Later in the morning he'd try and remember the look Wilbur had given him through the crack of his open door, one weighted with so much emotion it would've keeled any other man over. He'd blame himself for not noticing, though the drunk brain didn't appear apt enough to register the expression of heartbreak. He wouldn't piece the picture together until much later, that his appearance, the smell on his clothes, would hit a little too close to home for a kid who came from a house of addicts.

But Tommy never claimed he was smart.

"Tommy," Wilbur spoke, sounding like he'd been punched in the gut. "What the fuck?"

What the fuck indeed.

The sight of familiar fluffy brown hair, brown eyes that he'd been the victim of far too many times, it was enough for him to finally break. It was all so normal, and it contrasted his night so much it was jarring. He'd done something he said he wouldn't, he'd nearly fucking died.

The gates opened, and panic and regret flooded him.

"Wilbur- Wil- I fucked up," He said through harsh breaths, losing his balance and slamming into the doorframe. "*Fuck* ." His hand fisted into the wood to steady himself, nails scraping against the paint. "I'm sorry, I'm so sorry- Please, I don't- I really don't know what to do, I almost died and- I'm so fucked up, I've never, I've never done this before- I'm *sorry* Wil. I never change."

For all the times he'd seen Wilbur wear his emotions on his sleeve, he'd never seen the kind on his face at that moment. He looked *scared* , like he was terrified, and Tommy couldn't figure out why. Apologies stuttered helplessly from his mouth, he didn't want to fuck this house up but he had. As much as he wanted to deny it, he didn't want them to hate him. He *liked* them.

He'd fucked it all up again and it was crushing.

His apologies were swallowed by rapid breaths, and soon enough his vision was blurring. He was going to die- No, he should've been dead.

"Ommy- Tommy." There were hands wrapped around his arms, pulling him through the now open door. He quickly lost his balance, fully expecting to hit the floor again, but instead, he was yanked into Wil's grip.

His nose pressed against the soft fabric of Wil's sweater, breathing in the laundry detergent and distinct scent of the home they all seemed to carry. It was stronger than the toxic smell of alcohol, cutting through the smell of marijuana that had yet to escape him. It was everything he needed, things he didn't know he wanted. He felt himself go boneless, the smallest of tears still in his eyes threatening to dampen the fabric. He shook as he bit back sobs.

He wasn't going to cry.

“You fucking idiot,” He didn’t notice the crack in the voice, too caught up in the warmth of the body holding him up. “You’re so stupid-” The hands on his wrist let go, only to return as arms wrapped tightly around him, taking his full weight. “I’ve got you Tommy, you’re going to be okay. Just breathe.”

He let himself be dragged back and into the room, hands gripping into the sweater like it was the only thing keeping him alive. “Wil I feel like I’m dying- my head, ‘t hurts.” He said, muffled by the shirt.

He fucked up.

He let himself fall with Wilbur, sitting awkwardly on the ground as Wilbur held him up. Wilbur didn’t seem to know what to do, he fumbled with Tommy as he sat, but he didn’t let go. The gentle grasp of his hands made the bruises on his wrist ache, even when he was stupid this family handled him with care, and it hurt. He didn’t want to lose it, he liked them so much, so so much.

He regretted knocking on the door.

He regretted the entire night, he shouldn’t have taken the drink.

Wilbur was going to tell Phil.

He was going to be taken back, and he’d never feel care like this again.

A sob built in his chest, thrashing at his lungs to be let free, but he clamped it down. Instead, he shook with it, curling in on himself to keep it in.

He fucked up.

“Fuck Tommy- Breathe, you have to breathe with me.” One of Wil’s hands rubbed his back, the other still on his arm. “Take some deep breaths for me okay?” Tommy did his best to copy the rise and fall of Wil’s chest, but his body shook with the effort.

“It hurts.” He said, hands digging so hard into the sweater he knew it would ruin the fabric.

Just like he’d ruined this.

“I know, but you’re okay. I got you. You’re safe,” Wilbur’s voice shook, sounding like he was comforting himself as well. “You’re doing great,” There was a hand carding through his hair, shaking as it threaded through the messy strands. “What did you do Tommy, what did you take?”

He didn’t notice the crack in Wil’s voice, the fear and worry on his face.

Tommy took a shuddering breath. “I don’t know- I drank, there was weed- I can’t remember anything Wil.” The confession had his chest tightening again, thoughts swept into new surfacing anxiety. “Please don’t tell Phil- I was stupid, I don’t want to go.”

The hand pulled away from his hair, moving to his shoulder to push him back. Wilbur looked down at him, jaw set and brown eyes piercing right through Tommy. “Tommy don’t think about it right now, I need you to do exactly what I tell you.” Wil was worrying his lip, and even Tommy could tell he was stressed. “I don’t know what happened, but I’m going to make sure you’re okay.”

Tommy just nodded, something in him relaxing as he realized he wasn’t about to get yelled at.

“Okay good, you’re going to be okay.” He watched Wil frown, grip tightening on him. “We’re going to stand okay? I’m going to get you some clothes and you’re going to take a shower.”

If he was less fucked up he would’ve laughed at the situation, but instead, he grimaced. How Wil knew he was about to throw up at that moment, he didn’t know. He figured he must’ve somehow seen it in his face because as he heaved Wil had already leaned over to grab the small trashcan by his desk.

His hair was pushed back as he threw up more bile.

“That’s so fucking gross.” Wil murmured, probably meant just for himself but Tommy laughed into the trashcan anyway.

He wiped his mouth on his sleeve and grimaced at the stain it left.

“Tommy stay here, I need to get something.”

As soon as the words left Wil’s mouth his hand was back to gripping the sweater. “Don’t-” He trailed off, surprised at himself.

Wil smiled, and it was a broken thing. “Of course, you’re clingy when you’re drunk.” Wil’s hand was gentle around Tommy’s wrist, barely touching him as he tried to get him to let go. “I’ll be back, I promise.”

Tommy let go of the sweater, allowing Wil to stand up and leave the room, but not before his hair was ruffled.

This family was too good for him.

He detached himself from the trashcan, uncurling to have better access to air. He wanted to feel more embarrassed about how he was acting, but he couldn’t yet. He wanted to think he was a bigger man than this, but he really wasn’t. His eyes darted around the messy but cozy room, wondering what he should do.

He was still bloody,

Without much thought he half stood, half crawled out of the room. He could hear Wil somewhere down the hall, Phil’s door left open, the half-visible carving of DAD mocked him as he crawled into the bathroom.

For the second time that night, he sat on bathroom tile, this time leaning against the tub.

This shit sucked.

“Tommy?” Wil stepped through the open door, arms full of clothes, and something Tommy couldn’t identify.

“Hey, Wil,” He said flatly from the floor, looking up at him and thinking that Wilbur was like some fucked up off-brand angel coming to save him from throwing up his organs.

He wanted to die.

Wil frowned down at him, walking further into the bathroom to crouch in front of him. “Hi, little shit.” He responded, brushing some of Tommy’s sweaty hair from his forehead with a grimace.

“You’re like a shitty angel.” Tommy couldn’t help himself from blurting, watching as Wilbur brought something that looked like a walkie talkie with a tube sticking out of it up to him. “What’s that?”

“It’s a breathalyzer,” Wil said like it was a normal thing to have in a home.

Doctors, he thought.

Wil fiddled with it before he held it up to Tommy’s mouth, “Blow into it for three seconds, breathe into it for three, and then blow for three one last time.”

Tommy frowned at the tube, it seemed like overkill. “Is this necessary?”

“I could just drive you to the hospital Phil works at, but I don’t think you’d like that.”

Tommy didn’t complain and instead took the tube in his mouth. He felt stupid doing it, but Wil looked serious and he didn’t want to test him more. When he was done he watched as Wil frowned down at it, humming as he looked at the result.

“You’re fucked but not enough that I need to drive you to the hospital.” He answered, setting the device on the counter and standing back up. He set the clothes down on the counter, stepping in front of Tommy to lean down and turn the water on.

They sat in silence as he adjusted the temperature, shutting the plug so the tub would fill with water.

“We’re going to have to wash your clothes, they smell.” He said, stirring the water in the bath with his hand as he crouched next to Tommy.

When he looked over at him, Tommy shrugged. “Didn’t exactly think I’d look my best.”

Wil rolled his eyes at him, but then he tensed. Gone was the soft look, and back was the closed-off expression of anger he’d seen on and off the entire week.

“What?” Tommy asked, panic suddenly back for vengeance.

Wil reached out, hand hovering over Tommy’s shoulder. “Why the fuck is there blood on you?” Wilbur’s face shut down, and his eyes darkened. “Where are you hurt? Tommy, what the fuck happened?”

Tommy’s mouth went dry, and subtly he rolled his sleeve further down his wrist. He didn’t know how the hell to explain what happened without Wilbur immediately storming to Phil. There was something in Wilbur’s expression Tommy had never seen anyone direct at him before, if he looked close enough he could maybe call it protectiveness.

“It’s not mine,” He said, making a mental note to wear long sleeves until his bruises healed.

Wilbur glared at him like he was waiting for a different answer, but Tommy didn’t say anything. Eventually, he looked away to turn off the water, standing from his crouch.

“Wash up, and change into new clothes.” He still sounded tense, but not as bad. He pointed to the clothes on the counter, and Tommy nodded.

“Alright,”

For a moment they just stared at each other, and Tommy raised a brow. It looked like he was still searching for an answer, but Tommy didn’t budge. Finally, Wil huffed and stepped back,

“I’m sitting outside the door so just shout if you fall in or something.” He said, and then he was out the door, shutting it closed behind him.

Tommy could hear him slide against the door, making good on his words and actually sitting on the floor.

He was a good older brother Tommy thought, Techno was lucky.

—

Getting into the tub was an entire ordeal. He was thankful that at least there was a grippy matt in the tub, because if there wasn’t he was sure he would’ve actually had to shout for Wilbur. He stood in it for a second, the water was warm and soothing on his cold sweaty skin, but he’d yet to remove his clothes. He watched as water crept up the denim of his pants, waterlogging them.

Yeah, he still wasn’t thinking too well.

He stepped out, trying not to make too many sloshing noises as he quietly cursed at the dripping water. He was quick to hop out of his pants, slamming into the bathroom wall at one point when his foot got stuck in one of the pant legs.

“Tomm-”

“I’m fine!” He responded, finally ripping the wet denim off.

God this was gonna be a nightmare, the last thing he wanted was to wake Techno up, or worse have to explain to Phil why he was sitting in a bath kind of drunk with his son at the door. Thankfully his shirt was relatively easy to yank off, but as he did so he felt a twinge of pain he hadn't noticed before.

He threw it to the ground and almost instantly as his head was freed from the cloth prison his eyes settled on his chest.

"Oh fuck," He whispered, staring at what could only best be described as well, pretty intense bruising on his side and a motherfucking red seatbelt imprint.

He'd been lucky his ribs had healed up nicely when he first came to the house, as the bruises had faded only a bit into his stay with the Craft's as well as the rest of his bruising. But now there was an angry red splotch, some purple all against his side, and a red seatbelt imprint from his shoulder to his hip.

The fucking dashboard and seatbelt locking, he was going to *kill* Dream.

Pushing it to the back of his head he got in the tub, sinking into the warmth of the water and relaxing just a bit. He didn't know if it was just time or the cozy environment of the house that was starting to sober him up. Whatever it was he was grateful, because he could actually wash off without fatally injuring himself.

At some point he could hear quiet humming through the door as he washed the night off him. He should've been annoyed by it, but the idea that Wil was sitting by the door in case he was needed warmed him a bit.

When he finished up he sat there for a bit, feeling the water start to cool. It would be easy to hide the bruising on his side and chest, but he'd have to be careful about his wrist. He brushed his fingers against the delicate skin there, blue and purple with the whispered imprint of fingers.

Guilt shot through him as he remembered punching Dream.

Then he remembered sitting in the middle of the freeway.

Yeah, Dream had deserved it.

He leaned back, hands on the sides of the tub for leverage before he dunked himself in it. He shut his eyes to block out the water, the sound of Wil humming faded completely and he could only hear the water moving. For a moment, he could forget everything that happened, submerged in the water that embraced him with warmth.

Then his lungs stung and he came up for breath.

It was time to face the music.

Wil brought him some boxers, a long sleeve sweater, and some sweatpants. They looked like old clothes of his, a bit too big for Tommy, but comfortable nonetheless. When he pulled the

shirt on, he was pleased the sleeves were a bit too long. As long as he was careful, he could hide the bruises and avoid that look Wil gave him.

Tomorrow, he'd find something to cover it up, like the sweatbands he saw Techno have on his wrists sometimes.

Now fully clothed and out of the nasty clothes from before, he walked over to the door.

"Uh Wil?" He hesitated in opening the door, not knowing if Wil was using it to support his weight or not. "I'm done."

"Fucking finally," The door was opened for him, and he came to face with a tired Wil.

The harsher light of the hall had him flinching back, "Shit, it's bright."

"Yeah, and if we don't turn the light off right now Techno is going to wake up and beat our asses," He hissed, hand reaching out to grip on Tommy's sleeve and pull him out of the bathroom.

"Wait- what do I-" He stopped in the middle of the hallway, heart hammering as Wil stared back at him in confusion.

Panic swept him up at the idea of laying in his bed unable to sleep, wondering if tomorrow would be the day he was kicked out from their house. He knew it was inevitable but he wanted to bask in the comfort a bit longer.

"Trust me, It's all very lovely you've decided to finally open up and talk to me," Wil said, sounding somewhat genuine. "But it's nearly 2am, and we're in the *middle* of the hallway. Whatever it is, it can wait for when we get into my room."

Tommy's mouth went dry, and he whispered back, "Your room?"

Wil looked conflicted for a second, before the expression faded. "You're crazy if you think I'm letting your drunk ass sleep alone."

Tommy ignored the warmth that settled in his chest, and instead puffed his chest out. "I'm a big man, I don't need-"

His mouth clicked shut as he heard a thud, and both Wilbur and him stared at Techno's room. It was dead silent after, but the sound had most certainly been from there.

The hand around his sleeve tugged him forward, and Wil led them quickly into his room before he flicked the lights off and shut the door behind them. They stood in relative silence, aside from Wil's fan which had been gently oscillating. Before Tommy could say something Wil was turning around and puttering about in his room. He rooted through his closet, muttering to himself and Tommy decided to just sit on the floor.

He was getting kind of dizzy, and while the nausea had calmed some it still lay dormant.

“There’s water on the nightstand and some Advil, you should take both,” Wil said, dragging a large duvet and some pillows out. He threw both things at the side of the bed before he was back to rooting through his closet.

Tommy took the advice and scooped over to the nightstand, grabbing the pills and water and downing both. He set the bottle down next to him, bringing his knees up to his chest as he watched Wilbur work on forming a makeshift bed right next to his own.

“Drink the rest of the water fucker, I didn’t bring three bottles for no reason,” Wil growled, swatting at Tommy to get him to back up so he could throw more blankets and pillows to the ground.

“Alright mom.” Tommy scowled, spitefully drinking the rest of the bottle.

Wil arranged a duvet and some blankets on his floor as padding. He seemed finicky about it all, constantly moving around blankets and pillows. Tommy didn’t mind sleeping on bare floor, anything was better than a cold garage. He wasn’t going to tell Wil that though, there was no way they were about to have that conversation now.

Preferably they never would.

Wil finished his work, and looked down at it proudly, before he turned to face Tommy.

“Basket,” He said, and it took Tommy an entire minute before he realized what it meant and grabbed the trashcan to hand to Wil. “Thanks,” He said, shoving it at the top of the makeshift bed.

“Uhuh,” Tommy’s hands knotted in the sleeves of the sweater, scrunching the fabric over and over. “Why are you doing this?”

Wil froze for a second, and then he was back to adjusting the wastebasket, as if it somehow needed to be in a different spot. “I don’t know,” He answered finally, much quieter than he’d been before.

If he was sober he would’ve let it drop, but he couldn’t help but let the words slip, “It’s because you don’t want me to destroy your family.”

Wil’s head turned around so fast it looked like it hurt. “No.” He rebuked, glaring at Tommy. “Stop *assuming* everything,” He frowned at him, and Tommy finally noticed the permanent set to his jaw, the bags under his eyes.

There was something going on in the house, something with Wilbur. Tommy didn’t know why, but he hated it. He hated the stress on Wil’s face, the pain that seemed to be just below the surface. He hated that Techno seemed affected by it too, so much that he couldn’t help but let his worry for his brother overflow. He hadn’t been shy to the looks and whispered conversations Phil had with Wil either.

“Maybe,” He said quietly, much softer than he’d spoken to anyone in a long time. “Maybe if you told me, I wouldn’t have to assume.”

The weight of the words sunk between them, and Tommy half regretted speaking them out loud. But then Wil sighed so harsh that Tommy worried he killed him, and his head turned away to hit against his bed.

“That’s the million-dollar idea isn’t it?” He asked, voice bitter and rich like black coffee. “You sound like Dad,” He added.

Tommy felt like he lost the conversation somewhere, it was far too complex for them to be talking about it this late. “Are you going to talk to him about me?”

Wil stood up, turning just so he could plop down on his bed, looking down at Tommy with a wry smile. “No,” He answered, and Tommy didn’t allow himself to be hopeful just yet.

“No?” He repeated.

“No I won’t talk him, you will.”

His stomach dropped and he eyed the wastebasket worryingly.

“Don’t look so upset Tommy,” Wil went from playful to serious at the drop of a hat. “I’m going to talk to him first,”

“He’s going to kick me out,” Tommy whispered, mostly to himself.

“He won’t,” Wil said firmly, brows furrowed as something bordering on protective edged in his voice. “I’ll take care of it, but I’m going to tell him about tonight. I promise it’s not going to go like you’re expecting.”

He looked up at Wilbur, wondering how in the world anyone could look at a kid like him and throw it all away for drugs. He hadn’t known him long, but he knew him enough to understand how loyal he was to his family. His bio parents hadn’t deserved him, and for once instead of feeling jealous, he was grateful that Wilbur got to find people who did deserve him.

He may be bitch, but he was somehow kinder than anyone Tommy had met before.

Aside from Techno of course.

Though he figured they were fittingly evenly matched.

“Okay,” Tommy said, moving over to pull up the blanket on top of the makeshift bed and shuffle under the covers.

As he made himself comfortable on top of the warm blankets, Wilbur shuffled around in his nightstand. The floor wasn’t so bad, and neither was Wil’s room. It was messy, a stark contrast to Techno’s, but it was homey. There were glow in the dark stars on the ceiling he stared up at, he could picture a younger Wil sticking them up there with the help of Phil. It made his lips quirk up.

“Try and keep on your side tonight, you could choke on your own vomit,” Wilbur said, getting comfortable in his own bed. He must’ve been fiddling with his guitar before Tommy interrupted, because it was still at the foot of his bed. He watched Wil pick it back up from the corner of his eye, before he turned around on his side.

“Gross Wil,” He muttered, trying to ignore the nausea turning in his stomach.

For a few minutes he listened to Wilbur shuffle around, probably clearing his bed off. He tried to shut his eyes, but sleep continued to evade him. The soft orange glow from the lamp on the nightstand was the only light in the room, it bounced across the posters that covered the wall, the scattered clothes on the ground, and it complimented all Wil’s knickknacks.

Tommy new he’d been into music, with the headphones and constant radio, but it was different when he could see the guitars on the wall, the ukeleles and sheet music scattered around. He was sure there was an amp somewhere, and he wondered how he missed out on the fact that Wil made his own music. It was rather obvious, but he’d never pieced it together. Tommy thought it suited him, and it was almost charming in a way.

Just laying on the floor he could see the guitar picks that laid forgotten on the ground. He sighed, eyeing some of the random pasted stickers on the nightstand. The whole room was messy, chaotic, but in an artistic way.

“I’ll turn the lights out in a second,” Wil said suddenly, and there was the sound of drawers opening and closing.

Tommy didn’t bother to answer, instead his gaze was trailing across the various stickers, falling to the gap underneath the nightstand. He couldn’t see much of it because the light didn’t reach, but he caught the glimpse of something there. He could see the tip of a guitar pick, probably one long since forgotten, but it was too dark to make it out.

“Shit- where the hell did I put my phone?” He could hear Wil ask himself.

“Phil’s room maybe?” Tommy replied half-heartedly, reaching under the nightstand to grab the pick.

“Fuck.”

Tommy’s hand hit something hard, overshooting the guitar pick as he watched Wil stumble away from his dresser and across the room to creep into the hallway.

The door shut quietly behind him.

It felt like a small box his hand hit, just a ways behind the pick. He grabbed it, thinking it must’ve been something else forgotten. He didn’t have to pull it out very far to know what it was,

Marlboro

His lip curled back in disgust at the red and white packaging, shoving it back under the nightstand. He’d never seen Wil smoke, never smelled a hint of it on him or his clothes, but

he hoped he didn't start now.

"You were right," Wil grumbled, coming back into the room and shutting the door behind him.

For a moment Tommy entertained the idea of asking him about it, but thought better of it. The box was under his nightstand, hidden things weren't something people wanted to talk about. Part of being someone who went from home to home involved not asking too many questions. Locks on a door? Guns in the cabinet? Bags of powder hidden under tiles?

It wasn't his business.

But as he watched Wilbur settle into his bed with a bounce, mindful of stepping around Tommy as he did so, he felt the inexplicable urge to pry.

Wil wasn't his brother, he reminded himself.

This wasn't his family.

Not his business.

"Did you tell Phil?" He asked, grimacing as he turned to face the bed fully.

"Just messaged him," Wil said, tossing his phone on the bed and looking down at Tommy.

Tommy knew he made a face, because Wil's look softened.

"I'm taking care of it Tommy, if you're up to school tomorrow you'll go through your day no problem. He'll just talk to you about it later " He laid back, brushing his hair out of his eyes. "This is far from the worst dad's dealt with."

Despite himself, Tommy felt his lips fall into a small smile. "What, was daddy's boy Wil a partier?" He asked teasingly.

Wil's look faltered for a second before it returned. "Just go to bed little shit," He reached over to turn the lamp off, settling them in total darkness. "You're gonna have a killer hangover tomorrow."

"Not with doc Wilby nursing me back to health." He joked, though his heart wasn't completely in it.

He didn't like the way darkness felt final, like the night would come to a close and reality would set in.

"I will kick you out,"

Tommy didn't think it was true.

He could hear Wil move around, watching one of the blankets shift as he probably got under. They both had school tomorrow technically so they should sleep, but Tommy just let the

silence consume him. Bits and pieces of the night kept coming to him, and everytime he even felt the least bit sleepy he remembered the feeling of his knuckles hitting skin.

Anxiety was a stone in his stomach, it weighed him down in a hole of worry he couldn't get out of. He just listened to the sound of the fan, the soft breathing of Wil. It felt oppressive in a way, the pressure to sleep when he knew it'd be hard.

He kept thinking back to the look in Dream's eyes, the way he'd felt off. It was easier now to process when he was more sober and in the safe warmth of Wil's room. He'd never acted like that before, when he'd seen the look he was sure Dream had been a completely different person. He hadn't liked who he'd become either, reckless and aggressive. It reminded him of who he'd been just a few months ago, before this foster house.

Dangerous, scary, even to himself.

It was obvious in hindsight, he hadn't been the only one under the influence in the car. Maybe he should've noticed the twitching Dream had in the bathroom as he held him up. The snappiness he had toward everyone as they left the treehouse. Even the way his pupils were blown, far more dilated than he'd ever seen. He'd been acting off from the start, and Tommy had been too fucked up himself to notice.

He would bet his life on the fact that Dream had left for the rolling papers and gotten caught up in fucking around himself, probably getting high somewhere while Tommy got shitfaced.

How was he even supposed to feel about that? He was mad at him sure but hadn't Tommy been just as bad. Forcing Dream to drive him home, even when he'd protested.

"You're still awake aren't you?" Wil whispered, voice a welcome change to the thoughts that had consumed him.

"So are you," Tommy whispered back.

It was quiet again. He wondered why Wil hadn't fallen asleep yet. Maybe he'd been staring up at his ceiling, looking at the stars which glowed faintly in the dark.

"I shouldn't have let you go," Wil said so quietly and filled with regret Tommy could barely make it out.

Tommy's mouth opened to respond, but nothing came out. It'd been the last thing he'd expected from Wil, and he was more than caught off guard. He was beginning to think he really couldn't read other people at all; at least not as well as he thought he could.

For all the fight in Wil, the bitchiness, the mystery, there was an undercurrent of care that burned. He made no sense, and yet he made total sense. Tommy hated it, he hated it so much.

After all the arguing and weird conversations they had, Wilbur would do shit like this. He'd go out of his way to help when he could just turn Tommy away. And he got nothing in return, he expected nothing. He just cared, and it was terrifying, more terrifying than anything

Tommy had experienced. Because in moments like this, he could see Wilbur as his older brother.

He didn't have to imagine what it would be like, he figured it wouldn't be much different than how things were now.

Wilbur treated him like a brother despite everything, and he only got better at it the longer Tommy stayed.

It was getting harder and harder to detach Wil from the image of an older brother.

And now he was reacting like an older brother,

Like he felt he was responsible for Tommy's safety.

He swallowed the lump in his throat, "I thought you didn't want me," He said, voice cracking around the words like he could cry.

He wanted to run,

To run far away from Wil,

From his kindness,

From the hope he gave him.

Hell, even with Techno hanging out with him *every day*, letting him braid his hair, helping him with homework, and making sure he was always fed and hydrated, he wanted to run. These brothers were almost too much.

Tommy had been in the cold for too long, and interacting with their small bits of kindness was like sticking his hypothermic fingers under warm water. The warmth was good, it was saving him, but it was also burning. Everything rational would tell him that he needed the warmth, but it didn't stop the fact that it fucking scorched.

And he didn't know if he'd be here long enough for it to be worth adjusting to.

But when Wil's hand fell from over the edge of the bed, outstretched but not grasping, invitation clear in his open palm, Tommy knew he couldn't run. For the first time in his life, he wanted to stay more than he wanted to run.

He reached up, palm clammy with sweat as his fingers brushed against Wil's.

It didn't pull away, in fact it didn't move at all, leaving the choice up to Tommy.

He'd always dreamed of having someone to hold his hand when he was little, an older sibling to pick him up after he scrapped his knees and take his hand in theirs. Someone who would ensure safety with their grip as they supported him through his fears. He'd seen siblings walk hand in hand on the playground, grasping his own hands together just to see what it'd feel like. When he'd grown up, he thought he'd been stupid, foolish.

Hands brought pain, they took your wrist with bruising grip, they beat you bloody, they held you down, wrapped around your neck, dragged you to hell; Hands did unspeakable terrible things. He knew they weren't capable of anything else, at least not for kids like him. He'd been stupid to fantasize otherwise.

But he was wrong,

Because in the palm of the very thing he feared, embraced by warm calloused fingers, he placed his own hand; Grown and scarred, but hopes and heart just the same as that little kid grasping his own hand,

And that dream came true.

When Wil squeezed his hand in his own, so gentle and grounding Tommy shook. It had been different than he'd imagined, not like when he held his own hand, or when hands hurt him. Because this time it was real, and it was *so* much better.

"I didn't," Wil muttered wetly, grip firm as he squeezed his hand, like he needed it just as much as Tommy did. "I didn't but I-" His voice cracked, and the rest was left unsaid.

Tommy squeezed back, so hard his arm trembled. There were still cuts from the peeler on Wil's hand, a tremor in it that'd been present for days, but in Tommy's grip it felt safer.

It was almost surreal, and Tommy wanted to laugh at how simple it all was. It didn't change that the weight of Wil's hand in his own was like a cultural reset of his entire fucking life. It made him feel like it'd been so easy this entire time, to have someone who looked and him and thought,

'Man, you know what would be easy right now? Holding the kid's hand instead of beating the shit out of him'

Somehow Wilbur, the one who pissed Tommy off immediately upon meeting, was the chucklefuck who did it.

It was like coming up for air after years of drowning, and Tommy was basking in it. Though it didn't seem like he was the only one who was.

He blinked back his own tears, letting his foster brother shed the tears for both of them.

"Thanks, Wil," He said, so genuinely it terrified him.

He could feel Wil shake a bit with his tears, and it only made Tommy hold his hand tighter. He couldn't quite understand what was happening, but he did at the same time. It was almost too good to be true, to have Wil worried about him, so much so he felt guilty.

There was a shaky breath, "Shut up you little shit." Wil replied, voice cracking with tears and sounding so absurd with that stupid nickname that Tommy couldn't help but laugh. "If you do this shit again, I swear," The threat was empty, but there was almost fear laced in the words.

The whole thing was surreal.

“I thought Techno was the one you were worried would get hurt if I left,” Tommy joked, hoping to lighten the mood.

There was a sniff like Wil was trying and failing to collect himself. “You’re like a stupid lovable stray Tommy-“ He cut himself off with a muffled sob, “Of course I’d be the one most attached.” Wilbur made a choked sound, and Tommy couldn’t tell if it had been a sob or a laugh. “Oh god the *irony* .”

He tried to ignore the warmth that had filled him so completely, softer and lighter than any feeling he ever experienced.

Tommy swung their hands a bit, grip not waning. “I thought I was supposed to be the drunk crying one.”

A pillow was tossed down at him in protest, and Tommy laughed, hands still threaded together like it was the most natural thing in the world.

“We’re never talking about this again Tommy,” Wil tried and failed to say firmly, sounding half-embarrassed with himself. “And don’t even *think* about telling my brother.”

Tommy couldn’t stop the smile on his face even if he tried, and he wanted to bask in it. He cast everything else from the day out of his mind, focusing fully on the present. It wasn’t so hard to be attached to the family when he knew now at least Wil was attached too. If nothing else he had this, his hand in Wilbur’s, and a promise of safety, of security.

“But Willlll.” He complained, and it felt so natural, to pester like he was truly a younger brother.

“Goodnight Tommy,” Wilbur said, sounding not the least bit like he’d stopped crying.

Tommy laughed, feeling much lighter than he had been before. He let Wil be though, knowing he was probably going through his own shit. He was sure the crying was in part involving him, but it was also probably whatever else was happening as well. Part of him waited for the other shoe to drop, for the catch of the situation, but it never came.

Because even after the sniffing stopped, when both of them seemed to drift into unconsciousness, Tommy never let go of Wil’s hand,

And Wil never dropped his.

Chapter End Notes

i said they would be brothers. it was a threat.

And what did u think omffffg this chapter was a mess to write been waiting so long, don't mind any typos or anything that is like whack pacing or smth! I'm struggling with this whole computer thing. It's the way the comments last chapter were the only things getting me thru this chapter because god was rlly out here testing me.

Do u know how many things went wrong w this omfg. So yeah, this was a chapter that'd been far planned out in advance I've been waiting to write. so happy, but still there are a few more huge scenes I'm excited to get to. We're making progress, shoulda tagged this as a FOSTER SLOW BURN LMAO. We have so many characters and shit what am I doing, and the plot is so planned that if I forget like one tiny detail in a chapter it fucks the whole thing up. I can't express how deep this shit goes man, I'm not smart enough for all this bs omfgggg whyyyyy. So many mysteries and shit.

One thing I want to say, poor poor Wilbur bro. Like ya'll don't know the full picture YET, but POOR WIL. He's so going thru it right now you don't even know. GOOD NEWS THO! The thing going on with Wil? You'll know real soon... Just like cradle him in your arms because like omfg. Mans rlly pulled the dad like "I don't want the dog," and then was like "Me and the dog are besties now, and I would kill everyone and myself for this dog xoxo" Which ahahaha fun fact I did that as well w the cat sitting on my mf arm right now.

Poor Wilbur, and can't wait to figure out what's up with him, and Tubbo. Get some philza too maybe whooo knowssss. You didn't hear this from me but the next chapter? Two scenes that literally, were part of the creation of this entire fic. Existed b4 the rest of it did. I'm so excited to write it even tho I'm dead tired after shitting out 20k. Pray for me, and leave comments I literally love them so much. They keep me from dropping dead from these long chapters LMAO. Shout out to the people commenting long comments, and the people who comment every chapter, shit makes me cry /pos

Regarding Techno

hey, so I could've made this much earlier but I needed some time to myself. I'll try to keep this succinct since I'm sure all of you have heard this or variations of this hundreds of times before,

If you are not aware of what happened with Techno, the content creator, please check his YouTube channel and watch the latest video.

I found out about what happened from minehut actually. I was playing minecraft on a server, and I saw people spamming in the lobby chat that Technoblade was dead.

I assumed he'd uploaded a Minecraft video and died in game and I was overjoyed to see the new content/ see what happened. I immediately went to his YouTube page, I was on call with a friend and I remember laughing and as the video loaded up, and a man came on screen with his dog, it started to sink in

I hate myself for joking about it. I will never forget the feeling of my stomach dropping as the whiplash of emotions came through.

im sure this is already boring you already, so I'll try and wrap this up. I won't bog you down with how I feel or my condolences or even how I'm grieving. I'm sure you all have seen lots of that.

This is regarding the fic

I love this fic, I have the next chapter in works, I have the whole thing planned out. But I am not sure if I can update it in light of things. I'm unsure if it's insensitive to continue it. I don't know if Techno would be uncomfortable by it, how his death changes things and what not. Am I disgracing him? What if I can't write him right? Is it wrong to continue to write him? To write the character he loved and worked so hard to make?

I do not know. I've spent a long time thinking and I just don't know.

And more importantly. Even if this fic character is just based off his dsmp character, it feels like part of him. This character is a part of him. A labor of love and work, that he created and cherished. I just can't ignore that fact.

Having character Techno, and writing him, hurts something fierce. I've found a unique feeling I've never experienced, but I'll try to explain it as best I can;

He's still alive to me. To have this character be alive, to be fine, it's a painful contrast of this tough pill to swallow. It's just not fair. It hurts. Having this character I love, play out in my mind, continue on, when I'm trying to comprehend that Technoblade will not... I just, can't fathom.

I almost hate character Techno in a way. How come he gets to remain? Why.

I hate myself that I can continue to keep him alive. That I can write him and he can interact with people, and just *live*. When his counterpart, a 23 year old, so many people loved, was stolen by one of the most horrid degenerative diseases ever, and will never walk this earth again. Why?

Anyway, I don't know if I should continue this. Comment section is open for opinions/thoughts/ or anything. That's all. Sorry for dumping all this.

Shout

Chapter Notes

HOLY SHIT I FORGOT A WHOLE SCENE IN CHAPTER FIVE AND JUST REALIZED!! GUYS GO BACK AND READ CHAPTER FIVE BECAUSE I FORGOT TO PASTE IN TWO FUCKING K OF WORDS THAT I LITERALLY WROTE BUT DIDN'T COPY AND PASTE AND IT WAS IMPORTANTTTTTTTTTT

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Please read note; TLDR reread the first part of chapter 5 because I completely left it out and it was important sorry lmao

Philza

Hey Tommy, Wil let me know something happened when you were out last night. I'll be home when you're done with school today, let's talk about it then. Worried about you mate,

Through bleary eyes, he saw the message, but instead of being anxious about it, something else spiked his nerves. There was a distinct lack of message from someone, and maybe it was a good thing, but instead, it made something twist in his stomach.

He turned his phone off and turned over, hoping to catch another hour of sleep before his alarm went off. He fell into a state somewhere between wake and sleep, listening to the sound of Wil's gentle breathing from the bed.

—

A hungover Tommy was not a happy Tommy.

The second he woke up, it was to a headache and mind fog like he'd never experienced before; complimented with the sudden flash of broken memories of the night. To say getting into the car for school was a struggle, would be an understatement. Wil practically had to drag him down the stairs.

He finally sat in the backseat of the car, the cold window soothing against his pounding head and providing some relief. If Wil was any less tense himself, then Tommy was sure he'd be teasing him. Instead, they sat in the car in total silence, the radio not even on as they waited for Techno to finish chugging his morning protein shake and come to the car.

“Wil-“

“Politely- do not talk to me right now.” Wil muttered groggily, bringing a shaking travel mug full of coffee to his mouth. When Tommy frowned out the window at the words, Wil sighed into the coffee and added, “Just a bad morning Tommy, it’s not you.”

When Techno came trudging out of the house towards them, bag slung across his chest, he seemed to take one look at the car before he was opening the backdoor and sliding into the seat next to Tommy.

“Are either of you going to tell me why Tommy is dead in his seat today after you both woke me up last night, or should I assume to worse and call dad?”

Wilbur glanced into the rearview, making eye contact with Tommy. He waited for Wil to say something, but when he didn’t make any move to, Tommy realized he was leaving the decision up to him. He groaned, sinking further into his seat.

“I got-” He waved his hand, ignoring the way Techno’s eyes zeroed in on the movement. “You know, stuff.”

Techno didn’t have to respond to that, he just slowly raised a brow and Tommy groaned louder.

“Oh my god,” He muttered, covering his face with a hand.

He was more than embarrassed about it, and he didn’t have the time or energy to unpack the whole thing. His chest ached from where the seatbelt left a bruise, and he’d practically clutched onto his sleeve constantly to cover the bruises. Wil had told him he’d have to talk to Phil today, and he couldn’t imagine working up the balls to tell more people.

“He’s just having some trouble, Dad already knows about it,” Wil said finally, and Tommy tried not to send him a grateful smile.

Techno just hummed, lips set in a fine line. “Okay,” He said, finally buckling his seatbelt and settling down.

“God, stop being a worry wart,” Wil said, attempting to exit their driveway with far too much speed. “If this is what you’re like as an older brother I’m lucky I’m older,” He joked.

“Says the mother hen,” Techno quipped, already pulling out a book to shove his nose into.

Tommy sunk into the familiarity.

First period was weird.

Tommy spent far too much staring at Tubbo, who had come in twenty minutes late only to sit down and not move an inch. He’d been looking at his empty notebook, and Tommy would be less concerned if he was just fast asleep instead of unblinking. He had half the hungover mind to sneak a text to Ranboo about it, but he didn’t risk more because of Mr. Smith’s hate boner for him.

The time seemed to draw on, the monotonous voice of Mr. Smith grating on his nerves for what seemed like an eternity. His head was foggy, and all he wanted was some cold water and a dark room to lay in. The voice of his least favorite teacher wasn't exactly helping his mental state. When the door opened and he stopped in his lecturing Tommy melted in his seat, at least he did until he noticed it was Sapnap.

Irritatingly enough he looked fine despite how much Tommy knew he'd been smoking last night. He didn't even have time to come up with a reason why Sapnap would be in his classroom before he was being called to the front.

"Office needs you," Mr. Smith droned, looking at him like he was the one responsible for the class being interrupted.

For the first time that morning, Tubbo looked at him, but he was already out the door with Sapnap. From the brief glimpse he caught, it was unreadable; He cursed the timing of it all. He hadn't known Sapnap was an office helper, but now that he did, he couldn't help but think how much sense it made. It was an awfully convenient thing for one of the garden club members to have direct contact with the office.

They'd only gotten a bit of a way through the hallway before Sapnap stopped and turned to him. At least he looked sober, eyelids actually cracked open enough to see around them, and no hint of the prominent red veins from last night.

To Tommy's abject horror, he reached into his massive hoodie pocket, pulled out something huge and wrapped in foil, and held it out.

"Here," He said, cradling it in his hands like it was a child.

Tommy didn't know whether to be disgusted or terrified by the offering, so he chose both. "What is *that*?" He did not reach out to grab it.

Sapnap rolled his eyes hard. He shoved it into his chest so fast that Tommy had no choice but to hold his hand out and stop it from rocking his shit. The foil was so warm it startled him, and goosebumps erupted across his arms in response.

"It's for you. Breakfast," Sapnap explained, fully dropping it in Tommy's hand.

Tommy examined it carefully, holding it with both hands as he timidly pulled back a corner of the foil. A warm tortilla met him behind the foil, a sweet but spicy smell hitting him right in the face. "It's a burrito," He said, almost confused. "Why did you pull me out of class to give me a burrito?" He looked up from it, now glaring at Sapnap, brief memories from before rising to the surface.

He may have large blank spots in his memory, but he had enough snippets to know Sapnap was not really the person he wanted to see this morning.

Sapnap had the gaul to look sheepish, seeming far less careless than he did the night before. The look was gone quickly though, replaced by a mask of indifference and a shrug.

“It’s my famous hangover burrito, swear it helps. It’s super greasy and shit,”

“Okay- and why exactly have you given me this monstrosity?” He couldn’t help but be suspicious, especially since, “It’s like five fucking pounds dude.”

That got Sapnap to crack a smile, “You can’t tell me you’re not hungover and craving something hefty,” Quickly though, his smile disappeared and he looked serious once again. “Also, it’s an apology- for last night,”

Tommy looked down at the burrito again, wondering how it could possibly make up for the shit storm that was the night prior. He could vaguely remember Dream pushing Sapnap, angry at him in the bathroom. Melting into the couch next to him, laughing hard through smoke because for some reason the amount of pores humans had was just hilarious. Being pushed into Sapnap as more people filled in the room.

At least from all the flashes of orange in his spotty memories, he knew that Sapnap had stayed with him all of the night until he’d run off, even when there were countless more people.

He couldn’t exactly say the same of the person who was supposed to be his only friend there.

“Cool,” He said, too exhausted to be mad.

He tucked the foil back together, going to turn on his heel when Sapnap stepped in front of him. For a second he even mourned the sound of Mr. Smith yelling at a kid for erasing too loud.

“Wait,” He said, and Tommy inwardly sighed; nothing was ever as easy as receiving a burrito and leaving.

“What,” He said dryly.

“I’m sorry, well we all kind of are,”

Tommy bit his inner cheek so hard he could taste blood, the foil crumpling in his grip. From how uncomfortable Sapnap looked, he knew this wasn’t something he enjoyed either. He wondered briefly why he hadn’t just dropped the conversation, but then realized he might not be doing this of his own accord.

“Wow, thanks,” He replied, not sure what else to say.

“No dude-” Sapnap fumbled looking frustrated with him, his brows furrowed, and Tommy debated walking away again. Finally, he sighed, shoving his hands in his pockets. “We didn’t know Dream would pull that shit, on god.”

And that had Tommy stalling, wide eyes looking into Sapnap’s. He didn’t know if he’d heard it wrong. He assumed Dream had sent Sapnap to apologize, being too pussy to do it himself. But he hadn’t thought Dream would tell him what happened-

“You know, with his car and shit. George is pissed at him, we all are,” Sapnap finished, looking about as distressed as he could after spending a night absolutely roasted, which was not by much.

“What is Dream fucking bragging about it?” He asked, wondering if Dream had boasted about it or some bullshit like that.

Maybe he’d tell everyone that Tommy had punched him while he was driving. His heart sunk at the thought.

“God no, idiot called after he totaled his car,”

Tommy just stared at Sapnap for a moment, taking in his relaxed posture, and the calm tone despite the words he’d just spoken. His mind crawled to stop as he tried to process it, the warm foil just a muffled feeling on his skin. Even despite what had happened last night, he cared about Dream, constantly checking his phone to see if he had messaged. At least now he knew why he hadn’t.

“Fuck, is he okay?” He found himself asking.

“Yeah,” He felt part of himself relax at that. “He’s fine, car isn’t, just a minor fender bender,”

Tommy hummed. He shouldn’t be surprised really, in hindsight, especially now that he was sober, he knew Dream had definitely been fucked up on something. They never should have even gotten into the car. They really could have died.

He cleared the thoughts from his head, focusing back on Sapnap.

“Where is he then?”

“He’s detoxing at George’s. Idiot didn’t even bring rolling paper before deciding to get high,” Sapnap said like it made the situation so much worse.

Tommy’s mind raced, or at least it tried before it was all too much and it went completely silent.

“I’m going back to class now,” He said, but he didn’t take any steps towards it, suddenly far too exhausted.

“Alright dude,” Sapnap replied before he was off down the hallway without much complaint.

Tommy was grateful for that at least, but he couldn’t help but linger in the hall. There wasn’t much even going through his head, but his brain felt heavy with things, even though he couldn’t hear them. He pulled out his phone, trying to tell himself he was being the bigger man as he opened the chat.

Tommy

Sorry for punching you

Btw sapnap told me abt the accident

Ur fucking stupid, idk what you were thinking

Hope you're ok

He didn't expect a response, and he wasn't surprised when he didn't get one back right away.

—

The rest of the day went relatively quickly. Everything was pushed to the back of his head. He felt like he wasn't able to think about anything without shutting down. Dream had responded to his message at some point, but Tommy didn't even bother looking at it, he just wanted to get through the day.

By the time he was walking back into the house behind the brothers, he hadn't even thought about the talk he was about to have with Phil. Seeing him waiting in the living room, leaning on the side of the couch with a coffee in his hand, reminded him of what he hadn't been able to think about.

"Fucking hell," He muttered to himself, walking straight up to Phil.

He looked down at him, not sure what to say, or how to start. He wondered briefly if this would be it, but he remembered Wil's words from last night, and some of that worry faded.

"Let's talk outside," Phil suggested, and Tommy didn't complain.

He left his backpack on the side of the couch, feeling the heavy weight of Techno and Wil's staring as he followed behind Phil. Neither of them were subtle, and he at least felt himself lighten up a bit at the thought. He got one last glance at them before he was around the corner and presumably heading to his demise. He could just make out Wil's relatively weak thumbs up and Techno's concerned look.

When they finally settled into the nice woven chairs on the porch, Phil's coffee left steaming on the table between them; Tommy slouched as far in his chair as he could, Phil finally spoke,

"So, you want to explain what happened last night?"

Tommy's heart rate jumped and he sunk further into the chair, feet hitting the metal base of the table soundlessly. His right sleeve was gripped in his hand tightly, covering bruises he knew would absolutely cause a stir. He knew the conversation was coming, but finally faced with it in the moment was far more intimidating than expected.

"There's not much to talk about," He said, knowing it was a mistake almost immediately.

Phil, for all his attempts at being neutral leading up the conversation looked like Tommy had shoved an entire lemon in his mouth.

“Tommy, Wil told me you came home late, drunk.” He said, with a stern look. “Mate, when I said you could go out with friends, I didn’t think I had to clarify that you shouldn’t do something so *stupid*,” Tommy couldn’t tell if he was angry as he said it, or more exhausted. He did his best to hold down the defensiveness that rose almost as easily as breathing.

Phil wasn’t yelling, he wasn’t attacking yet. He took a steadying breath, and relaxing his initial reaction. He didn’t say anything in protest. He knew a lecture was coming, but Phil’s voice wasn’t raising.

“I’m sorry,” He said, for once being genuine.

Phil sighed, looking defeated. “I’m not looking for an apology Tommy. I’m trying to figure out why you felt the need to get drunk. Is this a reoccurring thing?”

“No,” Tommy couldn’t help but cut him off, feeling the defensiveness flare as he thought back to the night. “I don’t drink- Well I hadn’t.” He swallowed, his throat suddenly dry.

He said he wouldn’t, never thought he would, and yet here he was. He couldn’t help but be irritated with himself. He’d fucked himself over with his own weakness, it didn’t matter how sure he was when he thought he wouldn’t do it, all that mattered was that he took the glass laid in front of him. Growing up alone meant he had only one person to trust, and that was himself. And now? He wasn’t sure if he even had that anymore.

Phil didn’t look like he believed him, didn’t look like he trusted Tommy, and it made something in his chest ache. He couldn’t blame him, not really. As much as he wanted to direct his anger at anyone but himself, he wanted to stay in this house more.

Phil looked like he knew what he wanted to say, and maybe he had since he’d had an entire sober night to figure it out. “I don’t allow that in this house Tommy. Do you understand the effect that can have on your brain? If this is a problem I need you to tell me so we can figure something out.” His features seemed to relax as he looked at Tommy with something painfully caring. “There’s no shame in substance issues, but you’re young and can’t possibly comprehend the life-altering effect they’ll have-”

They were all things he knew, the way any kid that even breathed in a public school's direction did. He knew the facts, knew the statistics, seen the videos, the presentations, the programs. He could know all the facts about something, memorize every saying, every terrible consequence, but information couldn’t hold even the whisper of a flame to the experience. He could study the map of a country for years, learn every landmark, every name, but it didn’t change how out of depth he’d still feel standing on the fucking grounds of it.

Knowing it was not the same as knowing the experience

“Phil I don’t ever drink,” Tommy interrupted, feeling something like self loathing claw at him uncomfortably. “It was a stupid decision, I’m not going to do it again,”

And he meant it, but he’d also meant when he told Dream he wouldn’t get involved in the first place. And the distrust he felt in his own words, was terrifying.

Phil's expression didn't give anything he was thinking away, and his tone remained relatively neutral much to Tommy's relief. "Why did you drink then? Where did you get the alcohol? Did Tubbo and Ranboo pressure you?" The questions were rapid-fire and direct in only a way an experienced parent could be.

"No!" He said quickly, straightening up in his seat now. He hadn't thought of this falling onto his other friends. "I didn't hang out with them, it wasn't them-"

"You don't have to protect anyone kid," Phil said placatingly, mask of neutrality breaking for just a moment.

"I was at a party!" He admitted almost annoyed, even though it wasn't exactly true. "I lied about hanging out with them because I really wanted to go to the party." The lie easily slipped from his mouth, the improvised story falling into place right before his eyes.

Phil surprisingly, seemed to relax at this.

"Tommy, I don't *think* that's an environment you should be in," He said almost sarcastically so, disapproval thick in his tone.

"I know," He said, half baked plan still forming in his head as he was executing it. "It's just everyone was talking about it and- I wanted to go."

"I'm assuming there were drinks there?" Phil asked.

Tommy nodded, a bit too eager to get the excuse out. "It looked fun- I just wanted to try it. Nobody pressured me." He admitted, and the words felt sour in his mouth. "I regret it- It wasn't for me," And it was the only honest part of his made-up tale. "I'm sorry Phil- I really am,"

For a long moment Phil just stared at him, seeming to take in his story before he responded.

"How'd you get home? How'd you even get there?" He asked, and Tommy wasn't blind to the distrust in his eyes. Philza was a lot of things, but he was not stupid and that was for sure.

"Just begged some upperclassmen to drive me," He left out the part about it being the notorious dealer of the school. That probably wouldn't please the already suspicious Dad getting on his case.

"You should've called me to take you home," He said finally, looking a bit irritated. He made it sound so simple, and maybe it could've been if Tommy wasn't caught up in an actual clusterfuck of bullshit. "I'm never going to hold things like that against you, I won't be mad. I would prefer you home safe then out drunk like that," The sincerity in Phil's voice hurt Tommy, and he wished he could be genuine back, this man deserved it.

"I was embarrassed and I didn't want you to be mad." He said, lump forming in his throat.

He didn't want them to hate him. He wanted Phil's approval, and it was pathetic. The idea of Phil being mad at him became so foreign it was terrifying. It'd be easier if he was an angry

guy, but he wasn't, and that made it seem all the more scary. No matter how jaded he was, a not so small part of him hoped against all odds this house would truly be different.

"It's okay Tommy, shit like that happens," He said, and the words were painfully comforting, "I don't expect you to be perfect, I have two boys, I've dealt with plenty. So I need you to promise to call me, or one of the boys if this ever happens again."

Here they were having a genuine moment. One where everything felt so natural, like Phil not yelling or hurting him was *easy* and *simple* and not something to be expected. It was all Tommy had ever wanted, and here he was lying right to Phil's face. Guilt welled up in him, and the fact that he wanted to seek comfort from Phil, who would mostly definitely provide it, only made it ten times worse.

"I promise," He said, hoping to hide the way his knuckles bleached from their death grip on the chair. God forgive him, he pleaded.

"Thank you." Phil said with a relieved sigh. "From now on I want to talk to the parents of who you're hanging out with, at least until I can trust you won't do this again."

His hands released their grip on his chair, and he wiped the sweat off of them with his jeans. He'd done it, mostly. "Alright," He agreed, knowing he was far from done with the interaction, but the worst had miraculously passed.

When the conversation officially ended, Phil had given him a hug, ruffling his hair like he was one of his sons. Tommy did his best to not be weird about it, but the action had him burying his head into Phil's shoulder, chasing the warmth and feeling of safety he'd never felt so freely offered before.

"I just want you to be safe kid," Phil said, patting his back soothingly, in only the way a dad could. "I'm sorry, I couldn't be there to help,"

The defeat in Phil's voice had Tommy breaking, the lump in his throat growing as the words sunk in. He'd been so scared that night, and he couldn't help but picture how nice it would've been to be picked up by Phil. Would he hug him like this? Comfort and scold him like he was his son?

He never would've come home with the bruises, the taste of earth shattering dread rotting in his mouth. Maybe he wouldn't be so confused about his friendship with Dream. His thoughts could've rested easy. Would it have been that simple? A phone call?

He didn't know, but the idea would haunt him like the foul taste in his mouth.

Phil didn't pull away from the hug until Tommy did. The arms around him were nice until they weren't, soured by his own thoughts. But Phil's arms never felt restricting, and they gave away the second Tommy slightly leaned out of them. He took a step back, breathing in the easy space between them.

Phil looked at him intensely again, and Tommy was starting to get used to the expression. It wasn't anger, though it initially felt like it, it was a kind of firm concern.

“If anything else happened at the party, you can tell me. We can talk about it,” Phil said firmly, but welcomingly. The glint in his eyes made Tommy feel like he expected something else, and he probably did.

He felt the phantom ache of the bruise of a seatbelt, the pressure of fingers digging into his wrist, the fear of being on that road, his fist yielding to the give of flesh.

“Nothing else really happened,” He said.

—

He ended up spending that day watching TV with Phil, it was one of the rare moments he didn't have to head off to work. Tommy took advantage of it, soaking up the steady presence of Phil at his side. He didn't know when he'd become so clingy, but he didn't have the energy to fight it. He helped Phil make dinner, sat at his side at the table, and finished up the movie with him.

All the while Phil never complained, only sending Tommy a fond look when he thought he wasn't looking.

Everything was good.

Then when he laid down to go to bed that night, his phone chimed with a notification, and he read the message and it all came crashing down.

Unknown

You told me last night but I didn't believe you.

So I looked it up.

Lol.

[Criminal Record Tommy J Inn.jpg]

[News Article Attachment]

Guess you do fit in here.

Keep your mouth shut about what happened, and these won't get out.

He was stone cold sober when he vomited in the toilet that night, having a panic attack much worse than anything prior. It was almost funny, how every time he felt he'd gotten his footing in the house something worse came around the bend to knock him out of it. He stepped out of the bathroom anxious but not surprised, trembling and dazed like he'd been shot.

Motherfucker.

He didn't notice anyone was there until he slammed into Techno, flinching back violently and barely able to catch himself as he stumbled back.

"Tommy?" He asked surprised, eyes raking up his hunched over form. He was in the red plaid pj pants he always wore, and an old black gym shirt. He was usually shorter than Tommy, but in this moment as Tommy hunched in on himself, he was taller. It didn't help how intimidating he looked.

"Techno." He replied, unable to hide the shake in his voice and the quick breaths he'd been dealing with since he'd seen the messages.

"What's wrong?" Techno asked suddenly on alert and far more awake than he'd looked prior. Tommy wanted to laugh as he thought about the very very long list he could reply with.

It was probably because of how exhausted he was, but he didn't care about keeping up appearances anymore. "I think I'm having a panic attack," He said, and it was the absolute understatement of the year. Other than the time Techno had tried to blend his protein smoothie and forgot the lid, and claimed it was a "bit of a lapse in judgement,"

Tommy wanted to laugh as he thought about the memory, but then he was right back to thinking about how he was literally never going to get a moment like that again if his shit was aired for everyone to smell. He choked on a breath and placed a hand to his chest like that would somehow catch it.

Techno looked lost for a moment, seeming far out of his depth in the situation. Tommy would've completely forgotten he was there if it weren't for the intense staring. He took some mercy on him, going to push past him and head to his room. He didn't even get a step by Techno before being stopped by a hand on his arm.

Fuck his killer reflexes.

"Let me help," Techno said quickly, almost like he hadn't expected he'd actually say it. When Tommy looked up at him he even fucking seemed shocked enough for the both of them.

He waited for him to take it back but he didn't, only looking more serious as time went on.

Well, he did feel comfortable around him. He considered Techno a friend since they hung out nearly everyday. But he didn't know if they were *this* close, close enough for Techno to help him out and not get scared off.

"It's really not your problem." He said,

"Dude, I think the person hyperventilating in my hallway at midnight on a school night, *is* my problem," Techno said deadpan, and despite himself, Tommy snorted.

Then he promptly choked, once again thinking about how Techno would react much differently if his secret got out.

How had he been so stupid?

“Wow okay. I didn’t think I was unfunny enough to make a child cry, but guess I’ve been fooled.” Techno joked, awkwardly. He kind of patted Tommy’s shoulder with a heavy hand, slowly pushing him towards his own bedroom door that was still open.

“I’m not crying.” Tommy rebuked, adamant about it. His eyes were teary, and he might be hyperventilating, but he wasn’t about to start crying in the middle of the hallway of a foster house. He wasn’t fucking *four*.

“Coulda fooled me,” Techno said, and at this point he was just dragging Tommy into his room with far too much ease.

When they got through the door Tommy shrugged the hand off, walking ahead and finding a place for himself on Techno’s floor. He tried to focus on his breathing as he leaned against the side of the bed frame and mattress. He watched as Techno shut the door behind him, the only light being the soft glow from the lamp on the desk. He was thankful it wasn’t an overhead light, those never helped panic attacks. They just reminded him of hospitals, and Tommy’d had enough of those.

When Techno turned and looked down at Tommy, it was obvious he didn’t know what to do. They kind of just blinked at each other for a minute, until finally he spoke,

“There’s a perfectly comfortable bed, and you chose to sit on the floor,” He said dryly.

Tommy glared up at him through struggled breaths, “It’s my panic attack, and I get to choose the location. If you want me to sit on the bed then you fucking have one.”

“Heh, no thank you,” Techno replied, seeming less stiff as he walked further into his room.

He hesitated when he got to the bed, but instead of sitting on it like Tommy expect, he plopped down right next to him. He was close enough that Tommy could just feel the warmth from him, but nothing else. They sat there in silence for a bit, Tommy trying to rectify his breathing, and Techno just staring at his wall.

Every time Tommy made progress, he thought about the message again, about the power being held over him, and he was back to spiraling again.

Ten minutes of this felt like an eternity, and it only seemed to actively get worse.

“Do you want me to get Wil?” Techno asked bluntly, staring worriedly over at him.

“No.” Tommy said, thinking about how tired the other had been the whole day. He’d brushed his teeth with eyes practically closed, and only been able to mumur a goodnight to Tommy before he shut himself in his room; probably to immediately pass out.

Techno shifted like he was about to get up, “I’ll go get dad-”

“Please, just stay,” Tommy rushed, feeling guilty about the request because he knew Techno was probably uncomfortable. “I’m fine.”

Techno laughed, like he couldn't help himself. "Do you need me to pull up the dictionary definition of that phrase? Because I don't think you're using it right."

If anyone else had said that to his face while he was in crisis, he'd have killed them. But for some reason the way Tehcno said it had been fine, so instead he hung onto the conversation, glad for the distraction.

"Fuck off," He said halfheartedly.

He leaned over, digging his shoulder into Techno's and using his full weight to try and push him over.

Techno didn't even budge an inch, instead pushing back and tipping Tommy over before letting up. "No." He replied, sounding much more comfortable.

Tommy wasn't shy to how tense Techno had been when he'd first sat down. He hadn't seemed to relax until now, when Tommy had done his best to push him over. He wondered if that was why he always wrestled with Wilbur, it seemed to come a lot easier then anything else. He seemed to prefer tackling then hugging.

"You're kind of shit at this," Tommy blurted with poorly hidden amusement. "I think I might have to be comforting you,"

Techno grunted, which wasn't exactly a no. "Not my fault you chose the guy who spends half his time at the gym to have an interaction requiring emotional intelligence,"

Tommy couldn't help but smile, head thudding heavily onto Techno's shoulder with force he wouldn't use on anyone who wasn't fucking chiseled. "This feels like bullying," He expected Techno to roll his shoulder and get Tommy off when he didn't move away, but it never happened.

Techno was as quick in the conversation as he could be on his feet. He didn't seem to want to let Tommy sit too long in the sound of his own panicked breathing. "New psych study just dropped, bullying doesn't cause panic attacks, it cures them."

"Is that what you're reading all the time? Psychology bullshit." Tommy asked, half genuine curiosity and half insistent need for distraction.

"I've got an emotionally stunted foster brother, it comes with the territory."

It took him a minute to realize the comment was about him.

"Shut up." He muttered, closing his eyes as he took some deep breaths. Techno's shoulder was firm under his head, and he was warm in the otherwise cold room. He tried to focus on those feelings instead of the dread. He was slowly starting to calm, but he knew that it wasn't going to fade. He was sure if he was alone he would've had to book it, exert himself until he felt like he couldn't even exist anymore. The quiet of his room would've drove him insane.

His eyes shot open when the weight of an arm settled around his shoulders, breathing temporarily paused. He barely had time to register anything before warmth was heating up

his trembling shoulders and he was being pulled closer with ease.

“What are you doing?” He asked, truly frozen in shock.

“Comforting you.” Techno said simply.

“You’re *cuddling* me.” Tommy said aghast, hyperventilating long forgotten under the weight of *Techno’s* arm around him without it being a chokehold or some fighting bullshit.

“I’m not cuddling you.” Techno grumbled, but his arm remained holding Tommy close in what could be considered a ‘cuddle’. “Wil likes physical comfort, and you seem to respond well to it too,”

Tommy knew Wil liked physical contact, he was a very tactile person. He was clingy with his family, though not in a bad way. He tended to get hugs from his dad, leaning against him whenever he could. He was always in Techno’s space, hanging off him, wrestling, ruffling his hair. They were very close, both in their bond as brothers and in a tactile way. Though through it all, he could hardly recall moments where Techno initiated any physical contact that didn’t start with wrestling.

“*We’re cuddling.*” Tommy murmured to himself, wondering what he’d done to experience something so pure and brotherly.

“I could snap you in half.” Techno said blandly, the threat completely empty though totally possible.

Tommy hid his smile behind his sleeve. This situation was absurd, but just enough to keep him distracted. This stupid family always seemed to know what to do. Techno particularly was an ever steady presence, always consistent. All of Tommy’s life had lacked stability, and Techno was the pinnacle of it. He was always hanging out in Tommy’s room, helping with his homework, adding second helpings to Tommy’s plate without being asked, making sure he always had water.

“We’re like bros.” Tommy said, voicing his realization out loud. “You and I, Technoblade and Tommy, bros, homies.”

If Techno thought he was being weird, he didn’t comment on it. “Sure, Tommy.”

Tommy snickered to himself, “Oh my god, is this what brothers are like.” He hadn’t even meant to say it outloud, and he sure as hell hadn’t expected a response.

“Yeah, exactly what it’s like.” Techno answered, without missing a beat.

Tommy’s heart raced for a reason other than panic then, wide eyes snapping to look over at Techno who seemed just about the same as always. His mind was jumping through thoughts faster than the speed of light, rapidly analyzing every little bit of the situation. He could’ve heard him wrong, could be hallucinating. He stared unblinking at Techno, who was now looking back at him.

“You know Tommy,” He started, amusement laced in his voice. “It’s really not encouraging when you imply to someone you see them as a brother, and they look at you like you’ve punted a child.”

“What the fuck.” He said, brain looping the word brother over and over again like a broken record.

“I didn’t know this would be such a shock.” He said genuinely.

Tommy thought Techno must be stupid.

“How would this not be a shock?”

Techno huffed, rolling his eyes with a reserved fondness Tommy had only ever seen used for Wilbur. “I went into this wanting a younger sibling Tommy, I got one. It’s my brilliant machinations finally coming to fruition.”

Tommy paused, not sure what to say. He couldn’t look away from Techno, waiting for a crack in his sincerity, or for the punchline. It never came, because for as lighthearted as Techno was, he also seemed dead fucking serious. Tommy was floored.

“I’m just a foster, I’m here for *four* months.” He said, almost argumentatively.

Then it was Techno’s turn to look at him like he was stupid. “I know you’re smarter than that Tommy.” And he didn’t look away, didn’t say anything more than that.

The implication was so heavy in his words that Tommy’s world came to a screeching halt, and everything else had fallen to the wayside. He felt so much he couldn’t feel anything anymore, and it was almost unreal.

Finally, he looked away from Techno.

Maybe he *was* smarter than that, maybe he could understand the implications. A family where every foster had been adopted, where fostering seemed to have the goal of furthering the family and not just lining their pockets. He’d never entertained it, when he even got close to those thoughts he’d scold himself. Because he knew where they led, and he didn’t dare hope. He didn’t dare be wrong.

So, he’d walk around the thoughts like landmines, just as he had since Wil had told him about their little family.

Techno looked away, seeming to realize his own words had been impactful in an unfathomable sense.

But he didn’t take them back, didn’t remove his arm from Tommy.

He just continued to stare at the wall, the same deadpan as ever. The only difference was that Tommy could feel him fidget. “You don’t have to see me as an older brother, I’m not putting that pressure on you.” He said, and his fingers fiddled at the end of Tommy’s shoulder, and it was the only give of emotion he had while Tommy was positively shaking with it. “I’m just

letting you know, from the moment you stepped through the front door, I knew you were going to be my younger brother, foster or not.”

—

Dream

Sorry.

I was really fucking high

Can't remember a lot of what happened

I probably deserved to be punched tbh

Tommy?

—

“You’re hanging out with the gardening club now?” Tubbo asked him as they were walking out of school together.

He stiffened, not sure how to answer that.

A week of shit had gone by since that night, since he’d gotten the text from who he now knew was George. Tubbo still refused to admit something was off with him, he hadn’t seen Dream in person yet, and the gardening club had taken to keeping him close. Sapnap would talk to him casually in the hallways like they were friends now (Tommy insisted they weren’t), he’d slowly but surely been introduced to the other members (he only really liked brown vans, Callahan, because he didn’t talk), and the weight of a threat still hung over his head like an anvil.

He kept waiting for something to happen, but nothing ever did. He was unbelievably mad at himself for being so stupid, he still didn’t remember a lot of the night, but he knew at some point he must’ve told George about the investigation. The thing he’d been tight lipped about since it started. He promised himself he’d enjoy this house, that he wouldn’t open his mouth and ruin it. Now he didn’t know what he’d gotten himself into. What would Sam say if he knew the shit Tommy had gotten himself into?

Now he wasn’t just messing with stupid shit, he was screwing with the entire shakey circumstances of being a foster and not an-

Well, he didn’t like to think about that.

He'd have to play nice.

So, whenever they stopped him in the hallway to chat, he did so without hesitation. He wouldn't rat them out and George wouldn't say shit. He'd spend the last two months of this home enjoying it, and then he'd leave and no one would ever know. The home wouldn't find out, Sam wouldn't have to make the call, and he could continue on until one day he was 18 and on his own.

It was just inevitable his friends would notice the shift.

"I guess, I am," He said finally, eyes scanning the parking lot for a familiar car. Usually he could hear it, but today there was no muffled bass and it had him wondering if Wil was late.

"That's cool," Tubbo said, looking at Tommy from the corner of his eye with furrowed brows. Tommy thought silently about how it was very much, not cool. "You know there's rumors about them being into drugs and shit right?"

Tommy tensed and did his best to avoid Tubbo's eyes, leave it to him to be blunt as hell. Sure there were rumors about them, they did deals at the back of the school, but he knew nobody was aware of how deep into illegal shit they were in. Selling weed to friends was one thing, but the control they had over every school party and more in the area was absurd.

"Yeah," Tommy prayed he'd catch eyes on the car soon enough so he could leave the conversation.

"You been to one of their parties?" Tubbo asked suddenly, seeming to 'light up' at the idea of it. Well as well as he could nowadays, which was basically just looking slightly less like a complete zombie.

Their parties were notorious, though not everyone was invited. Everyone in them tended to be a lot older than highschool lowerclassmen, that's for sure. He'd been invited to a few by Sapnap, out of good grace, he'd rejected every invitation.

"No, I don't go to them." Tommy replied quickly, finally spotting Wil's car.

It had been parked there the whole time, and he'd probably looked right over it five times. There was no sound of music coming from it, and his brows furrowed. Maybe it was a quiet music day? That was unusual for a day after school.

"I found Wil, I'm gonna head home," He told Tubbo, already taking a step into the parking lot to head to his reprieve.

"Tommy wait," Tubbo stepped off the curb, walking after him with his overfilled backpack bouncing behind him. "You should get us into one of the parties," He said, eyes lit up more than they had been in a while, and *something* in his voice.

Tommy wanted to say no. The idea of being anywhere after school near that group again scared the shit out of him. But losing his friend scared him more. Tubbo had been distant and

weird lately, but the way he looked up at Tommy now was very much the chaotic friend he'd made when he'd watched him fall into a toilet.

"I don't know if that's a good idea, we're not exactly the type of people that'd be there," He responded finally, hoping to skirt around it despite knowing if Tubbo pushed, he would cave.

Tubbo rolled his eyes, "Oh for fucks sake Tommy, it'll be fun. We'll drag Ranboo with us. We have to go to a high school party at least *once* in our lives."

He worried his lip, eyeing the car that was just a few steps ahead. He could faintly make out Techno sitting in the passenger seat, reclined with a book in his hands. He wondered if Wil was watching him have his internal battle through the side mirror. He hoped he at least wouldn't recognise the expression he made when he settled on doing something stupid.

"Fine," He said quietly, almost disappointed in himself. "But I'm not fucking guaranteeing anything," He added, glaring down at his friend.

"Hell yeah." Tubbo said, hopping up to wrap an arm around Tommy's shoulders and bring him down in a weird side hug.

"Jesus fucking christ," Tommy said, battling with Tubbo's arms as he tried to push him off. He appreciated the contact, there hadn't been much of it in a while, but his neck felt like it was about to break in the awkward position.

"Thanks dude! It'll be great, just trust me," Tubbo said, with a smile.

Tommy couldn't help but smile back, it was the first one to reach his eyes in a while. He pushed Tubbo away, albeit gently. They said their goodbyes and he couldn't help but notice how excited Tubbo was even when he was running across the parking lot.

He was fucking soft.

When he finally got into the car, he was immediately tense again because the radio was off. Wil sat at the front, staring blankly out of the windshield, but his bouncing leg gave away his agitation. He looked to Techno for answers as he buckled up, unable to ignore the heavy feeling in the air and the anxiety it caused. Techno would appear fine to anyone else, but Tommy knew him well enough to see the white knuckle grip he had on his book, and the fact that his eyes weren't even scanning the page, but just staring at it.

The family had appeared to be doing better, hushed whispers with Phil faded, Wil had chilled out completely, and Techno was back in his normal routine. Though the cloud Tommy thought had finally lifted from them, seemed to come back full force in the tiny space of Wil's car.

Something was very wrong.

"Where's the music?" He asked, breaking the oppressive silence that had fallen over them.

He did not miss the way Wil's jaw clenched when he answered,

“Radio’s broken,” And it was all he said before he was putting the car in gear and reversing out of the spot.

If Tommy thought Wil’s driving was sketchy before, then he’d been dead wrong. He’d been gripping the side of the door since they got on the road. Traffic was congested as hell, and when they were finally able to move through a light, it was with a shit ton of harsh stops and honking. He knew it was just from the football game that had let out, but he hadn’t expected it to be so bad.

They were about twenty minutes out, barely much closer to the house when the light they were moving past suddenly turned yellow. Instead of passing through it, Wil slammed on the breaks and overshot. Tommy shot forward in his seat, seatbelt digging right into the bruise from the night before. He couldn’t help the wheezed curse that left his mouth, the only thing that helped was Techno’s arm thrown back in front his chest to keep him from going any further.

Techno’s eyes shot from Tommy, who he still had a hand on, to Wil who was cringing in the front seat as he rapidly backed out of the intersection and back behind the line.

“Wil,” Techno said firmly, his other hand braced on the dash like he had been hoping to stop himself from being brained as well.

“Sorry- I just, got distracted,” He said, checking around them to make sure he was backed up properly.

It’s true, the day was particularly full of traffic which was rough to drive through, but usually Wil could handle those days. His driving only seemed to degrade the longer they were in the traffic today though.

“You can just pull over,” Techno said, finally removing his hand from Tommy though hesitantly. “Wait until traffic clears up.”

Tommy couldn’t look away from Wil’s hands on the wheel, they were shaking against the black leather. He couldn’t stop the anxiety that thrashed in him at the now familiar sight, why did Wil shake so much? He was starting to pick up on the signs of whatever particular issue this was.

“Wil what’s going on?” He asked, but it was drowned out by the conversation in the front.

“I can’t, I’m going to be fucking late if I don’t drop you off soon,” The car shot forward again and Tommy’s heart was in his throat, faint memories of being drunk in a car just a week prior flashing through his head. It didn’t help that his chest now ached, the imprint of the seatbelt ever present as a reminder.

“Late to what?” Techno asked, the briefest hint of annoyance in his tone.

Wil shot Techno a look, one that Tommy couldn’t understand, especially with the flashbacks he was having. He tried to focus back on what was going on in the front, but the constant lurch and stop of the car was getting to him.

Techno's book was long forgotten on the floor of the car. "You never have meetings on Mondays,"

"Well, I do now," Wil said, sounding not in the least bit happy about it.

The car was tense with silence again and Tommy tried desperately to parse through the conversation and push past the fear grabbing at him. Though with every harsh jerk of the car he was reminded of that night, being unable to control his body or his actions, stuck in a car with a person who didn't seem to have control of himself. It wasn't the same situation, but it was close enough for his brain to think he was in danger again.

"You're going three times a week now?" Techno pressed, he seemed fully invested in the conversation now and was no longer looking back at Tommy through the mirror.

"Yeah," The word was punctuated by a harsh stop. Tommy fully removed the cross strap of the seatbelt at that point, safety be damned. If he had to feel it push into his bruise one more time he was going to jump out the window.

He looked back at them to make sure they hadn't noticed, his hand frankly edging to the buckle in the seat to remove it completely. He didn't like how it locked and restricted him, god forbid it do its job.

He couldn't quite make out the expression on Techno's face, but he knew it wasn't a pleasant one. "Does dad know?"

Wil's jaw clenched again and Tommy could practically feel the heat in the car rise. "Are you just fucking assuming he wouldn't?" He ground out, the familiar hot temper seemingly back from nowhere.

Techno was nonplussed, and both Tommy and Wil seemed to pick up on how he dodged the question. "How come you didn't tell me?"

"There's nothing to say," Wil snapped, taking a particularly harsh turn.

Tommy braced himself against the car door, praying to any higher power that would listen that they wouldn't wreck. When the car straightened he was slid back into his seat, eyes stuck to the windshield. Wilbur was driving faster now, and he pressed further into the back of his seat as if they were going to crash at any moment. It was almost better when the traffic was bumper to bumper, because now Wil had space to speed.

"Well there is if you've decided to go more,"

Tommy was literally watching them fuck an entire conversation up spectacularly and experiencing the consequences. He knew from the second either of them said something, it would make things worse. Like now, when Techno's words had Wil quite literally yanking on the steering wheel to turn.

"Maybe you shouldn't fucking have an argument in the car," He interrupted, a bit frantically, noting the way Wil's body language seemed to only get more and more tense.

Both of them ignored him.

“Is it just for this week or-”

“Fuck Techno, can you not do that shit?”

Techno scowled, and his voice was no longer its usual soothing drawl. “What? Address your problems directly. Because that's all you've avoided doing for three weeks,” And he was positively glaring.

The car jostled as Wil hit a curb going far too fast,

“Fuck!” Tommy shouted, gripping onto the door for dear life.

“Motherfucker.” Wil spat as he righted the car.

Techno seemed to snap out of his budding anger for a brief moment to see how hard Wilbur was breathing, clutching onto the wheel, “Wil pull over,” He said again, much calmer than before. “We'll wait for traffic to die down.”

“If I do I'm going to be late,” He said again,

“Please fucking pull over,” Tommy begged, praying the car would just stop already.

His breathing came in short bursts and he couldn't look away from the windshield, waiting for the impact he felt was inevitable. His fear was fully ahold of him, and he curled in on himself, trying to ignore the sound of arguing as he screwed his eyes shut.

He was zen.

So zen.

It was fine.

“Wil pull over!” Techno shouted, the loudest he'd ever been, and Tommy's heart jumped in his throat and didn't seem to come down.

He opened his eyes in time to see the car pull over, a shaking Wil guiding the steering wheel to turn into the mostly empty parking lot of shopping center. He fixated on Wil's hands against the black leather of the steering wheel, they looked so pale in contrast to it. As the car slowed so did his breathing, and he felt immense relief.

“Wil? What's going on?” Tommy asked for a second time as the car came to a full stop, jostling a bit in his seat as it shifted into park.

Wilbur didn't respond, just slouching in his seat with his head in his hands. “I don't have time for this,” He muttered into his hands, looking smaller than he ever had. Tommy's heart ached, and he wanted to reach out almost painfully so, but he was glued to his seat. He wasn't sure if it was even his place.

“Get up,” Techno said firmly, book long since kicked to the side as he unbuckled his seat.

Wil peaked through his fingers to look at Techno, not moving an inch from his seat. For a moment the car seemed to take a collective pause, and Tommy hoped it didn’t explode into the flames of another argument.

“I’ll drop you off for your meeting, then take us home,” Techno explained, a lot less annoyed but no less firm. Then he was stepping out of the car and shut the door behind him, leaving absolutely no room for argument.

Tommy watched through the rearview as Techno walked around the car, he was just flashes of pink and a large form before he was on their side of the car. Wil didn’t bother moving from the embrace of his own hands, and Tommy made no move to bother him either. When the click of the door sounded, and his door swung open, he finally dropped his hands.

Techno peered in at him with a blank look, and Tommy wished he could see Wil’s expression instead of the back of his head leaning lazily against the seat. After a few seconds passed between them with nothing said, he finally shifted, unbuckling his seatbelt and removing himself from the car.

Techno took his place, going to adjust the seat and mirrors almost instantly since Wil was taller than him.

To his surprise, instead of Wil taking Techno’s place in the passenger seat, he opened the door opposite of Tommy. He didn’t even ask before he was plopping down, shaking hands struggling with the seatbelt as Techno now watched the two of them through the mirror. When Wil was settled he made quick work of pulling out of the parking lot, but Tommy wasn’t focused on the driving anymore.

Wil had his head back in his hands, seeming to shrivel in on himself, and Tommy struggled to see his expression. He could see the way his back rose and fell far too quickly for someone who was sitting stationary. He glanced worriedly over at Techno through the rearview, hoping for some kind of explanation, but the other was focused on driving.

“Um, Wil?” Tommy asked almost painfully, his throat didn’t seem to want to form words to break the silence.

For a moment nothing changed, and Tommy wondered if he had even spoken at all, but then Wil shifted. A singular dark honeyed eye poked through the safety of his fingers to stare at Tommy. His heart paused in his throat, wanting to shrink under the gaze.

“The car radio broke,” He said, like it was explanation enough for his breakdown, and Tommy figured it kind of was.

“Oh,”

Tommy had known something else had to be going on, that no matter how much Wil relied on his music, it wouldn’t account for all of this. He figured it had to be the straw that broke

the camel's back, and he didn't know how to help. His brows furrowed as he stared at Wil, he was uncomfortable with the silence, but there was something more to it.

It seemed like the brothers always knew how to help him, but he didn't know how to return the favor. It wasn't just about owing Wil either, but seeing him so downtrodden was upsetting in itself. He didn't think stress was a good look on Wilbur. He looked better pouncing around the house with his fluffy socks and big sweaters, obnoxious singing dripping from his lips, setting his sight on any poor soul in his path to bicker with. Even in his quiet moments, sitting at the table focused on his work, he was buzzing with life itself. It poured from every movement he made.

He was big and boisterous, but now he just seemed small and subdued. It seemed like there were times when he was the Wil Tommy had come to know and care for, and others where he was just the ghost of himself. Maybe the Tommy before would've just turned his head to the window, gritting his teeth and baring the silence, but he couldn't tolerate the nagging feeling of worry in his head.

Tommy looked away to reach down and grab his bag, unzipping it and rooting around for the one thing he knew might help. As his hand found the familiar shape, he used his other to grab his phone and properly set it up. He used what little confidence he had to reach over, placing the headphones as gently as he could over Wil's ears.

Wil tensed, but as he seemed to recognize what it was, his hands dropped and he looked over at Tommy in bewilderment. Instead of answering Tommy clicked play on his phone, starting a song he knew Wil listened to often, usually to his annoyance, but now he was thankful for it.

The change wasn't fully blatant, but Tommy could see Wil's breathing relax as the song went on and he slowly unfolded from himself. He gave Tommy the whisper of a smile as thanks before he was shutting his eyes and leaning back in his seat.

Tommy tried his best not to stare, allowing Wilbur his moment of peace to calm down. Though if at some point during the drive his hand found Wil's; the memory of falling asleep with their hands clasped fresh in his mind, then no one could blame him.

—

When they pulled into a church parking lot Tommy expected it to lead to a shortcut, but when Techno pulled right in front of it he realized it was actually the destination. He didn't think they were religious at all, there had been no mentions of any kind of religion since he'd been there. Maybe it was just Wil who was religious. He refrained from asking, thinking it wasn't the best time to be nosing into things.

"We're here," Techno said as he parked, and to Tommy's surprise, Wil lept into action.

He pressed the headphones back into Tommy's hands, practically lurching out of the car and sending a quick goodbye over his shoulder. It felt like he was out of sight before he could even say goodbye, the doors to the church were swinging shut and it was just him and Techno.

“You can sit up in the front,” Techno said, and Tommy didn’t waste any time hopping out of his seat and situating himself in the passenger side.

He wondered if he should talk to Techno about what was going on, but when he saw him pull out his phone he refrained. He rested his head on the window, fiddling with the headphones in his hands as nothing but the sound of a phone ringing filled the air. He could feel a hint of worry linger in his stomach, it didn’t help that he was completely in the dark about what was going on.

“Techno? What’s up?” Phil asked through the car speakers, startling Tommy from his thoughts.

“I’m driving Tommy home. I had to drop Wil off at his meeting,” Techno hesitated, and Tommy tried not to look like he was focusing intently on the conversation. “Wil had a panic attack, he couldn’t-” The hand Techno had on the gear shift tightened. “He wasn’t able to drive, I had to make him pull over,”

Phil sighed, just loud enough for his phone to pick up the noise. “Shit,”

Tommy agreed with the sentiment.

“Is the kid okay?”

Tommy furrowed his brows at the name, but Techno’s look at him was all the answer he needed.

“He’s a little shaken up.”

Tommy scowled at Techno, upset with his assumption. He wasn’t shaken up. He was just worried.

“Tell him things will be fine,”

“He can hear you,” Techno said finally.

“Tommy things will be fine,”

He rolled his eyes, nosing his way further into the space between the window and seatbelt like he could get away from them. He didn’t feel like they would be fine, and he’d rather know what the hell was going on. He didn’t respond to Phil, and Techno took the liberty to pick the conversation back up.

They danced carefully around the situation with Wil, saying nothing of sustenance. Tommy knew it was because he was there, and it only annoyed him further. He knew he wasn’t entitled to know what was going on with the family, but for some reason, it really got under his skin. He shut his eyes and tried to tune it all out.

“Alright mate, my break is over I have to go.”

“What time will you be home?”

“I’ll try and pick Wil up from his meeting and head back to work. So, I’ll be back around nine tonight.”

He wondered if things would be awkward when they did their homework together today. Techno was tense, and Tommy didn’t blame him.

“Okay.”

“Techno, I know it’s hard but try not to worry too much about your brother, he’ll be okay. We’ll get through this, we’ve done it before.”

“Yeah,” Techno said, but Tommy didn’t think he sounded too convinced.

And boy, was he right not to be.

Chapter End Notes

Tysm you guys for all the comments last chapter. I'm going to try and respond to every single one because I've read them all so much. They helped to get through my slump.

I'm going to finish this fic, don't worry. Techno wouldn't want people to just stop creating fan content. I think it helps the community keep him alive and mourn. I love the character he created and I want to continue to explore him. I hope I can do his character justice. I'm so grateful for everything he did for the community, and my heart still aches something fierce from his passing. GG :(

I wrote about 20k words, but I'm only uploading this chapter right now because the next one is in the works at like 8k or smth crazy. I'm happy we're starting to get into the real meat of the story, thank you for being so kind and patient. The comments keep me going, truly. I hope this story will bring people joy as much as it has for me. I love talkin abt it in the comments so much, the true brainrot this au has on me mannnn.

Shout (con.)

Chapter Notes

wasssuh.

Sorry, this took so long to update, I relapsed it was awful Lmao.

I've been trying to write more, and be more consistent. I'm sorry guys, I'll try and update more often. I hope you like the chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy

When are you coming back to school

Dream

Idk probs next week

Did you finish developing the photos?

Tommy rolled his eyes at the message, fingers already tapping out a reply to the question. He kept glancing warily at the foot of his bed where Techno was huddled over a textbook. He knew the screen wasn't visible, but he couldn't help but feel paranoid he'd see right through Tommy just by looking at him. He turned the volume of his music up further, hoping he could lose himself in the sound and not his own stress.

At one point after he'd first gotten the phone, he'd added Sam's number, knowing it by heart at this point. He had a bad habit of opening the messages and debating saying something about what was going on, and then exiting out like he wasn't just about to hit send. He could always just check in with Sam, but he doubted he'd be able to do it without getting so nervous that it'd be obvious something was up.

Tommy

Yes.

Dream

Are you still mad?

Tommy looked away from the taunting three dots. He didn't want to have the conversation now or ever with Dream about his emotions or whatever bullshit. He thought he was relatively over what had happened, aside from the documents that could ruin his entire standing with his life here. It was fine, really.

He watched Techno look up from his textbook, and he instinctively pulled the phone closer to his chest. Techno wasn't looking at him though, instead staring at his barely cracked door. Tommy released a quiet breath, looking back at his phone as it buzzed with a new message.

Dream

I'm not usually like that.

I just fucked up, I didn't mean to scare you

The bed shifted ever so slightly, and Tommy was pulled away from the buzzing of his phone by the perplexed look on Techno's face. The textbook was forgotten on the bed, and Tommy could see how Techno seemed to go from completely relaxed to tense like a stretched rubber band. His phone buzzed again,

Dream

I can't believe I did all that shit, that's really not who I am.

I was just really fucked up. I'd never do it otherwise

I swear

I can't stop thinking about it

I didn't hurt you did I?

Techno stood fast looking so alert Tommy felt tense himself. Tommy tried to sit up properly, leaning closer to give him a questioning look. Techno put his hand up, mouthing "stay here" before he was creeping out of the room and slowly shutting the door completely behind him. Tommy blinked in confusion, setting his phone down and shifting one side of his headphones off his ear.

Through the faint music coming from his own headphones, he could hear the distinct muffled sound of voices loud enough to carry through the thick walls of his room. He didn't even

need to hear the words to know exactly why Techno had looked the way he had. Tommy's stomach dropped, feeling the whispers of adrenaline begin to shake his hands and quicken his breathing.

It didn't matter the language, the people, or the house; Tommy could identify the sound of arguing in his sleep, and that wasn't hyperbole. Tense voices, snapping sentences, interrupting each other, rising volume, it was all clear as crystal. The conversation was a dance, an exchange of information that had rhythm and pattern. Arguing was dancing to a broken record, pattern lost in distorted sound, a jumping needle making any pattern in the song untraceable.

He's first instinct had been to hide, his feet already off the bed and pointing to the closet he knew he could fit in. But then he'd heard it, the distinct inflection and tone only one person in the house used, Wilbur.

Tommy had heard Wilbur mad plenty of times, he'd heard him annoyed, sad, frustrated. He reckoned he could tell every mood Wilbur had by the tone of his voice. He thought it was something he enjoyed about himself, but in this moment he'd wish he'd never had the ability to identify the sickening sound of fear.

His headphones dropped to the floor, and he was on the balls of his feet and opening his door before he could even think. Voices became clearer as he headed to the stairs, the words slipping through his mind like water through a strainer. He was creeping down the stairs with the muscle memory aiding him in avoiding the creaky parts of the steps.

Why was Wil scared? What was going on?

His heart raced as he tried to identify what was going on, but he could barely see the back of Wil standing even as he leaned his head through the railing. Before he could get to the last few steps there was a hand on his wrist and he froze in place. Wide eyes looked down to see Techno sitting on the step just below him.

His brows were furrowed and Tommy could tell he wanted to say something, but he didn't want to make them known. He tugged down on Tommy's wrist, and he was stepping down carefully to sit next to him on the stairs. He tunnel-visioned on the tense back of Wil, watching with rapt focus and bated breath.

When Techno's hand unconsciously tightened on his wrist at a particularly loud shout from Wil, pain flared up from old bruises and Tommy tried to jerk his arm back. If he was any less fixated on the stony expression of Phil, he would've noticed Techno's eyes catching on the healing purple peeking out from his sleeve.

"Fuck Wil, I'm just trying to help."

Searching fingers traced against the purple and yellow spots, pulling back at the sleeve that hid the rest of them. When Tommy pulled himself just enough from the argument to identify the feeling, his heart was dropping. He caught Techno's eyes from the corner of his gaze, and as soon as he saw the look in them he tried to yank his hand free to no avail.

“Why won’t you just trust me? I can’t fucking stand the way you treat me like I’m thirteen again! I’m *different* now. And you and Techno don’t seem to fucking get it!”

“Well fuck mate, how am I supposed to know that when you’re shutting everyone out again?”

Techno turned Tommy’s head eyes running over the rest of the bruises, expression going from confusion to understanding in the blink of an eye. He could see him form a question on his lips, mouthing the last thing he wanted to answer. He scowled, frustrated that his attention was being pulled in what felt like five different directions at once.

“I’m doing everything right Phil! I’m doing everything that everyone fucking asks of me, and it still isn’t enough for you. You think I can’t see the way you and Techno look at me? Hear you fucking talking about me like I’m dangerous. I’m tired of this bullshit, it’s driving me up a fucking wall!”

Wil’s hands were knotting in his hair, rapid breaths choking out his words and he seemed like he couldn’t get them out fast enough. Techno’s insentient tugging was left to the wayside as Tommy focused on the way Wilbur seemed to shy in on himself, hunching as he had early in the car that day.

“I’m just trying to have a discussion with you! I understand-”

Wil laughed, and it sounded like knives dropping to the floor. “Don’t even try with me right now, don’t even fucking try that shit. You don’t *understand* anything.” He mocked, and Tommy watched in horror as Phil’s expression twisted and distorted into an emotion he hadn’t seen on him yet.

Anger.

“Clearly you’re not in the right place to have this discussion, I’m going to call your-”

“No ‘dad’,” Wil said sarcastically and Tommy felt Techno’s hand on his wrist practically go cold. “You want to fucking talk? Let’s talk, *Philza*.” Wilbur threw his hands out, backing up like he was showcasing the room. “This is what you wanted huh? Bring me home to this beautiful fucking family home and remind me how much I don’t fucking fit in.”

Tommy could see Wil just a bit better now. He could make out how heavy his chest rose and fell, the white of his fists, and the red just on the tip of his ears.

“That’s what this is fucking about Wilbur!” Phil shouted, and the volume sounded so intrinsically wrong on him it had Tommy nauseous. “I’m not having this conversation with you when you’re like this. Go to your room, I’m calling them now.”

Wil was backing up now, curling in on himself. Tommy’s hand-knotted into the fat of his thigh, nails scraping against the rough denim of his jeans as he felt his chest only pound harder.

“No,” Wil said firmly, tremble in his voice. “If you think I’m a fucking liar then I don’t want to be in this house.”

“Wil you’re not leaving like this.” Phil snapped. “Just get in your fucking room.”

“No, fuck you! I’m not listening to any shit you say. You think you can be at work all the fucking time and just know what the hell goes on here? You don’t know shit about me! You don’t know what’s going on!” Wil’s voice cracked, and there was something wet in his tone. “You just fucking assumed I fucked up again because that’s all I am to you guys. A fuck up!”

Phil’s face turned red, body tense with fury and Tommy’s breathing stopped and his hands went cold. He shifted forward ever so slightly, but Techno was holding on to him like a lifeline, keeping him glued to the stair and out of sight.

“Clearly I was right about something,” Phil muttered, lips pulled back and teeth flashing white. “Get in your fucking room.”

He’d seen this all before, heard it all before, and he knew how it ended. He knew it ended in blood spilled, bruises blooming on the garden of someone's skin. It had his heart in his throat, eyes glued to the scene like he was watching a car accident.

Wil’s whole body tensed, and Tommy didn’t need to hear his words to know he wasn't going to cooperate. His heart plummeted all the same though, knowing far too well what would happen if a kid didn’t cooperate. If he was naive he would say Wil looked mad, but he was smarter than that. Wil looked like a cornered animal, his body language screamed fear and it had Tommy on the edge of the step.

He was going to get hit. If he didn’t shut the fuck up he was going to get beat.

“No! Screw you, and screw this stupid ass family. I wish you never fucking adopted me! I’d be better off with my bio parents who at least fucking trusted me.” Wil began to walk backwards toward the front door, but Phil followed.

“You don’t mean that. Wilbur Craft, don’t you dare walk out of that door!” Phil threatened.

He prayed Wil would stop, would just be smart and listen. He wished Phil would back down, hoped against his better judgment that he wouldn’t raise a hand towards his son.

“You can’t fucking stop me,”

Phil’s hand was barely reaching out and before Tommy knew it he was stumbling over his own feet, vision white hot as he ripped his hand from Techno’s grip. Blood was rushing in his ears, images of raised hands, and clenched fists replaying over and over. Stairs turned to wood flooring as he shot out, the call of his name from Techno futile as within a second he had shoved himself between Philza and Wilbur.

“Don’t fucking touch him.” He snarled, posture straightening to tower over Philza and glare as fiercely as he could despite his trembling.

Something in the room seemed to break, and Philza’s anger parted like clouds to reveal confusion. “Tommy?” He asked, but all Tommy could see was red.

His hands were out ready to push Phil, creating distance between him and Wilbur, but it didn't feel like enough. Tommy could still hear the sound of Wilbur's shaking voice in his head, replaying how scared he looked when he'd been cornered. His jaw clenched when he saw Techno come out from the stairs, standing off to the side of Phil. Tommy only registered the presence as another threat.

"I won't let you hit him." He said, resolve stronger than it had ever been.

He was too gone to notice the realization on their faces.

"Oh god, Tommy I wasn't going to-"

"Tommy, Dad wouldn't,"

Tommy ignored them, turning his head to look at Wil who was staring down at him in bewilderment, but all Tommy could see was the track of tears on his face. He didn't say anything, but his expression was question enough. He looked back at Techno and Phil, breathing heavy in his chest.

"Tommy I would never raise a hand against either of my sons." Phil said, but it fell on deaf ears.

Wil's chest rose and fell in a staccato of shallow breaths, the wet of his eyes bringing out the red framing his warm brown irises. He was having a panic attack and he didn't look entirely present at the moment. He'd probably been out of it the entire day before this was the nail in the coffin and he crumbled, it had the cloying smoke of anger clawing up his throat.

Tommy grabbed Wil's hand in his own shaking hand, trying not to squeeze too hard as he dragged him to the front door; Wil went without protest.

Techno reached out to grab them, but Tommy could just see Phil's hand reach out to stop him.

"Let them go, it's okay."

Tommy was out the door with Wil behind him, not quite running but speed walking fast enough he had to drag Wilbur to make sure he was keeping up. He didn't have a plan, but all he knew is he wanted to make sure Wil was safe and away from what was making him panic. He was familiar with the itch to escape, the feeling of suffocating, panic, the manic urge to leave. He was unfamiliar with how much it hurt to see it on someone else. He led them down the long driveway, watching the way the breeze would sway the trees that surrounded them from all sides; it calmed him.

The Craft's had a nice home, it was rather secluded from town and neighbors, the closest house was far down the road. He was pretty positive Sam had been pleased about it, Tommy was less likely to run away if he was in the middle of nowhere. He'd been annoyed at first, but now as he led Wil onto a small concealed path in the forest he was grateful.

It opened up to a tiny stream, trickling past rocks and pebbles and leading deeper into the foliage around them. He stood at the edge of it, dropping Wil's hand with a squeeze and turning to look at him. Brown eyes looked just past his head, but his breathing had at least slowed.

"Wil," Tommy said, pausing to soothe his own breathing with the fresh air filling his lungs. His mouth moved slow, but his thoughts were rapid, and he struggled to parse out what to say. "Are you there?"

"Yeah," It took a while for Wil's gaze to meet his, but once it did his heart lightened just a bit.

"What was all that?" Tommy asked.

For a second Wil didn't answer, he came up to the edge of the stream, staring down at the flowing water. Tommy let him have the silence, looking down to gaze down at the tiny pebbles at the bottom stuck weathering the pressure of the water. They'd probably never leave the stream, they'd erode year by year, and eventually, they'd be nothing but sand.

When there was no sign of a response he sat on one of the boulders near the stream.

He could hear Wilbur sniff occasionally, and Tommy wondered if he was too embarrassed to fully cry. He seemed to relax the longer they were out there, untying the laces on his boots and setting them at the base of the rock where Tommy was sitting. He watched with his arms wrapped around his legs, content to stay perched there as Wil removed his socks and dipped his feet into the cold water.

Tommy didn't like the feeling of gravel or pebbles on his feet anymore, seldom being without shoes outside. Wilbur didn't seem to mind, walking into the water and kicking up some of the water aimlessly.

His body language seemed like a world of a difference compared to moments before in the house.

When his shoulders finally seemed to relax, he spoke,

"Dad wouldn't hit me," He didn't look at Tommy when he said it, but he sounded confident in his words. "Never has," Even as he said it, he still sounded tense.

Tommy shrunk into himself a bit as he thought about what had happened, resting his head on top of his arms. He still felt angry, but underneath it was fear. The idea of Wilbur being hurt had his fear so potent it trumped every other thought.

"You were fighting- I saw his hand reach for you." He said, almost argumentatively.

"He thought I wouldn't come back," Wilbur said harshly, and Tommy regretted saying anything. "That I'd do something stupid because obviously, I've gone off the rails." He laughed, and it was an ugly sound that disrupted the pleasant rustling of leaves.

Tommy felt frustrated, and he tried not to let it leak too much in his voice. "I know something is going on with you. You're fine, and you have bad days but it's not like this- not like today.

It's something else, something that keeps happening. Something that Techno and Philza are worried about." He huffed out a sigh, hoping Wil would turn so he could see his face. "Why won't you tell me?" He asked finally, feeling a weight lift from his chest.

Wil paced back and forth in the water, the sound of water sloshing almost too loud in the quiet.

"I'm not who I used to be." He said and Tommy's brows furrowed at the cryptic words. "I'm not." Wilbur's fists clenched and unclenched as he finally came to a stop, looking right at Tommy. He seemed conflicted like there was only chaos in his head.

"I don't get it Wil," Tommy slipped his legs down, sitting properly now as he studied Wil's every expression. "Whatever is happening keeps getting worse,"

Wil snorted humorlessly, rolling his eyes. "It's my job to keep it together, and I've gone and fucked it up." He sighed, shoving his hands in his pockets, and looking at Tommy thoughtfully. "I was doing better. It was just a bad day, one bad day-" He cut himself off.

"So then, what happened?" Tommy pushed.

Wil worried his lip before speaking again. "People've been quitting at the hospital and Dad's had to pick up their shifts. He trusts me to take care of things when he's gone and-" Wil swallowed. "A bad day turned into a bad week, and things keep getting worse." He was ranting now, words spilling from his lips with all his frustration. "Then Techno noticed and he's out of sorts, and now you're worried, and then Dad- I can't ask him to take time off. I've been through this, I've gotten over it, but suddenly everything I could handle, I can't." He shuddered, shoulders slumping as he caught his breath. "And the worst part is, they think- they think I-"

His mouth snapped shut, and Tommy got the feeling he just missed out on something big.

"I can handle this." Wil said firmly, "I can get through this, but I can't handle them looking at me like I'm who I used to be."

Tommy mulled the words over in his head, trying to piece together what he knew to see the full picture. "They're worried about you." He said, arguing with his own thoughts that were screaming at him to *protect*, to storm back in there and raise hell.

"Yeah, but they do that every time. Like they think I'm always one step away from backsliding. I hate it. We haven't argued like that since I was fucking fostered, I just wish they'd trust me." Then Wil laughed, and it startled Tommy so bad he almost fell over.

"What the fuck Wil?" He asked, steadying himself on the rock.

"I just- I don't know." He shrugged, "Here I am complaining about having a family that cares too much when I'm supposed to be helping you."

Tommy scowled at him, wishing he could kick some water over at him for such a stupid comment.

“Who said you’re supposed to help me.” He grumbled, glaring up at Wil.

“I’m older, it’s my job.”

“It’s not.” Tommy shot back, “We help each other, or whatever.”

Wilbur stared at him a bit too intensely, so he looked away, studying the grass like it was the most interesting thing in the world.

“Thanks, Tommy.” Wilbur said sounding calmer than he had all day, but it was so far from okay. “You thought I was going to get hit and you still jumped in front of me.”

Tommy looked up then, wondering what emotion was hidden just behind Wil’s eyes. He thought he’d be embarrassed by his actions, but he wasn’t. His heart had settled the second he felt like Wil was safe.

“Duh,” He said.

Wilbur’s nose scrunched, and the expression was so painfully normal Tommy wanted to sigh in relief. He wished it could stay that way, that things would be okay.

He walked up to Tommy, feet still in the stream as he reached out to ruffle his hair.

“Don’t ever do that in an actual fight.” He said, but there was no bite in his words. Tommy grimaced at his now messy hair, but he didn’t pull away from the hand. “Just run.” He said.

Tommy couldn’t help but grit his teeth at that, but he didn’t say anything. He wanted to be done with running. He wasn’t going to tell Wil that though.

He hadn’t known it before, but he did now. If anything were to happen to Wil, he’d fight tooth and nail to make sure he was okay. He’d be surprised, but considering how natural it felt to step in front of danger for Wil, he wasn’t really.

It was definitely a new feeling, but not unwelcome. Not when Wil’s fingers curled through his hair, evidence of crying long since dried up in the breeze.

Their little moment was interrupted by the sound of someone moving through the brush. They both looked to the path, watching as Techno came down to the stream. His gaze flicked from Tommy to Wilbur, seeming relieved to see them. Unfortunately, Wilbur didn’t seem to share the sentiment based on how his mood had done a complete one-eighty.

“What do you want?” Wil asked, dropping his hand from Tommy’s head but not moving an inch.

“Wanted to make sure you were still here.” He said, and Tommy cringed internally at the words.

Wil did not take them well. He tensed, glaring down at Techno who was relatively unphased.

“I can take care of myself.” He said with a bit of an edge.

Techno seemed to pick up on it, and he didn't approach any further. "You're upset, should I not have come?" He asked.

Wil deflated at that, and Tommy couldn't help but look between the two of them, feeling a bit awkward.

He worried his lip, barely tolerating the silence between them before he had to break it. "I think Wilbur just doesn't like that you guys assume things." He said hesitantly, looking up at Wil to see if he'd made the wrong move.

To his relief, Wilbur didn't look mad at him for inserting himself.

Techno's gaze zeroed in on Tommy, looking like he wanted to say a lot of things but barely holding back. He was looking at Tommy's injured wrist, and Tommy pulled on the sleeve, hoping Techno would get the message and not bring it up. For a second it looked like Techno scowled, but then he was looking up at Wilbur much to Tommy's relief.

Later then.

"Did you tell him?" He asked Wil, gesturing to Tommy.

Wilbur shook his head, and Tommy tried his best not to look phased by it. He knew they had the right to have secrets, but he hated the way they skirted just around the topic when he was there.

"What do you want?" Wilbur said suddenly, staring intensely at Techno. "You know I'm not going to be able to talk to dad right now, so what is it."

Techno's eyes narrowed. "You beating around the bush is pissing me off." He admitted, voice tight. "You haven't said anything to me all week, and then I have to watch you and dad have your worst fight. So sorry, I want to check up on what the hell happened."

Tommy blinked in surprise at Techno's clenched jaw, he'd never seen him really angry, and he was worried he was going to. This better not be another fucking fight. Who would he drag away in this situation? He didn't know. The two of them fighting would be the worst-case scenario, just thinking about it made him anxious. The idea of either of them being hurt was equally horrifying.

"I don't like talking about it," Wil said, sounding final.

"Is what Dad said true?" Techno asked his gaze seeming to burn as he practically glared at Wilbur. "I need to know if what he said was right."

The weight of the conversation was crushing, and Tommy wished he wasn't literally sitting between the two of them. Instead of looking back at Techno, Wil was looking at Tommy. He stared back, trying to figure out why he was staring at him.

"Wilbur, is it true?" Techno said again, this time some frustration actually leaking out into his voice. "You promised you'd tell me if it happened again."

Wilbur looked up from Tommy then, looking painfully conflicted. His mouth opened like he was going to say something, then it closed. He looked so hesitant, like he wanted to speak but couldn't.

Oh.

The realization slammed into Tommy like a bag of bricks.

He didn't want to say it in front of him.

He felt embarrassment lick up at him, and he tried to crush it down. Quickly he got off the rock and onto his feet, backing away from Wil. "I'll be inside." He said, mentally cursing himself for sounding so blatantly hurt by the situation. This was a family matter, and he was being weird by imposing on the conversation.

Wilbur reached out to him, "Tommy wait. I just-"

"No, it's whatever," Tommy said cutting him off, dodging the hand to make his way back to the path. "I get it, it's not my business."

Techno seemed to shoot Wil a disapproving look and his anger softened just a bit as he watched Tommy pass him. Tommy was quick with it, hoping to get back to his room as soon as possible. He drowned out the awkward silence and did his best to speed walk away from them as casually as he could.

He wasn't their brother, he had no place in the conversation.

Even if he wanted one.

—

That night Wilbur and Techno came back in the house looking marginally better at least like they'd talked things out. But Wilbur and Phil clearly hadn't gotten to talking, and Tommy didn't blame them, they probably both needed to cool down.

Techno, interestingly enough stayed the night on Tommy's floor. He hadn't really asked, just dragged some pillows and blankets into the room and took residence. Tommy didn't mind the company, he was always antsy after arguments and Techno looked like he could beat the shit out of anyone who came looking for one. The makeshift bed Techno tried to form was soon turned into a pillow fort by Tommy.

Before they fell asleep, just as Tommy began to climb his way out of the fort, Techno turned to him with something so sharp in his expression that he felt like prey.

"I need you to promise me one thing," He said, and just from the tone of his voice, he knew right off the bat that there was going to be no room for anything other than complete sincerity.

Tommy's tongue felt dry in his mouth, but he spoke anyway. "What is it?"

“I need you to tell me if you’re ever in any danger,” He said, and it was so far from anything Tommy was expecting he couldn’t help but look painfully confused.

“You have bruises on your wrist,” Techno added and it clicked for Tommy, how could he forget? “They look like they were caused by someone.”

Tommy struggled to find words, Techno was staring at him with emotion so intense he couldn’t think. The feeling of shame clawed at him like he’d done something terribly wrong by not saying anything to Techno before. He wasn’t sure what he could say that would explain it all away, nor was he sure he could lie right to Techno’s face after the day they’d had. It’s not like anyone had cared about bruises before, granted he’d never really felt the need to hide them. Everyone knew his place, but here it was different. Here it was expected.

Then he thought about the pink vans dirtied in the closet, decorated with dots of dried blood and soles scuffed to hell and back. The messages from George, the ones he checked far too much hoping he would click on it one day and it wouldn’t be there. How was he supposed to tell Techno that he wasn’t *in* danger, but that he had a tendency to cause it?

“They’re not- that’s not what they’re from.” He shuttered, feeling his face grow hot with guilt. He felt like he was caught under Techno's gaze.

Techno’s brows furrowed; not in confusion, but in frustration. “Then how’d you get them?” He asked.

“It was a stupid fight,” Tommy rushed, the words pulled from him without his permission.

Techno’s face darkened, and at that moment he looked like he could kill. “Who?” He asked, voice full of embers and hatred.

When Tommy didn’t answer Techno’s jaw clenched, but his voice remained at a steady volume. “Tommy, I’m dead serious. If something is going on, you need to tell me right now.” Tommy could see the flames of anger from earlier begin to spark again, and he couldn’t help but brace himself. “Who did it?”

The way he said it almost sounded like a threat directed at him, and he had to swallow back his budding nerves.

The answer burned like smoke in his throat, and all he wanted was to cough it out before it burned him from the inside, but he couldn’t. He imagined extinguishing it, how good it would feel to finally let it out. Instead, he shoved it down, resigned to let it fester in his lungs until one day there was none of him left.

Never had he wanted to spill something so bad.

“I just got into a fight at a party, wasn’t really a real fight,” His heart pounded so hard in his chest he could barely hear himself talk. “That’s what Phil had to talk to me about.” He clung to the lie. It was the false narrative he’d have to spin just to assure his security in the house, in his relationship with the family.

For a while Techno didn't say anything, just stared at Tommy as if he was looking into his soul. "I want the truth Tommy," He said, though it didn't sound like he was in total disbelief of the story.

"I'm telling the truth. It wasn't a big deal, I get into fights all the time; always have."

Techno looked displeased. "It is a big deal." He corrected harshly. "You don't think it's a big deal, until all of a sudden it is. By then you're in too much crap to get out,"

The words had blood rushing in Tommy's ears. There was something Techno wasn't saying, something Tommy couldn't quite grasp lying just past the surface of the conversation. The way Techno looked at him like he had something specific in mind was making the hairs on the back of his neck raise.

"Techno," He breathed, trying to calm his heart just a bit. "What do you mean?"

Techno shut his eyes, and for a moment it seemed like all he was focused on was his breathing. When his eyes met Tommy's again, there was a defeat so palpable in them that he had to look away.

"You've probably heard rumors in school," He said, and Tommy's thoughts moved even faster than the thrumming in his chest. "I used to like fights, a bit too much. I couldn't stop starting them, gave Dad a lot of stress over it." He admitted.

"I didn't know," Tommy said, and it was true. He'd heard whispers about the Craft's, but he'd never paid too much attention. He couldn't picture Techno fighting. He knew he had the physique for it, but Techno was the same guy who always trapped spiders to bring outside.

Techno smiled, and it was a look Tommy hadn't quite seen before. There was no humor or joy in the curve of his lips, if anything the glint of his teeth was just on the edge of scary, "I was always angry, always thinking, and the only thing that stopped it was fighting." His fists clenched and unclenched like he was remembering how it felt. "I didn't care who it was, or what trouble it would get me in, I just needed to get it out. I was a dumb kid with anger issues and far too little care for myself. It didn't matter if I lived or died."

Tommy's heart sunk. "Techno--"

"It's different now, but I need you to listen. I'm not stupid Tommy, I can look at someone and see the same thing I had in them. And I can see it in you, am I wrong?"

Tommy shook his head, and Techno continued.

"You might not care about yourself, but when you fall deeper into that mindset? Self-destruction doesn't stop at you, it's a fire you can't control and it will burn down everything. Nothing will be untouched, the things you care about, people you love, just like that."

"Why are you telling me this?"

"Because I don't want to see you make the same mistake I did. I fell into the wrong crowd."

Tommy tensed, feeling a particular sense of dread he'd only felt a handful of times. "What happened?" He asked, hoping he didn't sound too desperate for the answer.

He knew it was the wrong thing to ask the second it was out of his mouth because suddenly Techno didn't look like he was in the room with him anymore.

"I lost a friend." He said bitterly, focusing back in on Tommy. "And I put my family in danger because I was weak."

"You're not weak," Tommy argued, thinking about the sheer strength Techno had not only mentally but physically.

Techno laughed, "No, not anymore. I promised myself I'd never be weak again, that I'd never force the people I love into a position where I can't protect them." His expression lightened a bit, and he seemed to relax. He reached out to ruffle Tommy's hair. "It's why I need you to promise me you'll tell me if you're in a tough spot. I don't drink nasty protein shakes for nothing Tommy. If nothing else, make sure my suffering isn't in vain. I can wreck anyone you need."

Tommy tried to be lighthearted, but something nervous was buzzing in the back of his head. "Sometimes you're just as dramatic as Wil." He joked.

"He's contagious, it's terminal." They both relaxed; breathing in the lightheadedness before Techno was clearing his throat again. "But seriously. Promise me you'll let me handle the fights instead."

Tommy took a deep breath, wondering if this was the world's cruel karma for all he'd done. He had always hated people who made promises they couldn't keep, and yet he'd become one. "Only if you won't tell Wil about this time," He said,

Techno's face darkened, but he nodded, and Tommy caved.

"I promise,"

—

He'd been naive enough to think the next day would be better. He'd woken up in a foul mood, the lingering guilt heavy on his chest, arguing voices echoing in his head, and the distinct oppressive silence that only existed in a house after a fight. From the start of the day he was suffocating, gritting his teeth and baring the smoke in his lungs.

The only good thing about the day had been his and Techno's awful rendition of hamilton as they desperately tried to fill the otherwise silent car. Of course, he'd started it, dragging Techno in, and ending with Wilbur rapping along near perfectly. It seemed to help the mood some since the radio was still out of commission.

Then things went sour, rapidly. First period he was kicked out by Mr. Smith after quietly arguing with Tubbo about the party he really didn't want to go to. He stormed out of class

with sparks of anger in his lungs and a growing sense of dread. Then Sapnap had found him in the hallway and dragged him to the back of the school with the promise he'd get someone to take care of the office.

One thing led to another, and the tense but decent conversation turned into handing over a baggie full of god knows what to someone who definitely didn't look like they went to high school for cash. He had to do it twice, both times with shaking hands in place of Sapnap who in his words had to "take a massive shit before the entire school regretted it." His No's died on his tongue when he remembered the documents sitting innocently on his phone ready to ruin everything he'd built up.

When he handed the cash to Sapnap he was passing through the hall on the way to second period, barely handling the rolling of his stomach. He'd mentally checked out and came back sometime in third period when his pen exploded and stained his hands and desk blue. He got yelled at, cheek bleeding between his teeth and fists digging as deep in his pockets as they could.

By fourth period he'd ripped his favorite shirt on his locker, slammed his hand in a door, and received an ominous message from George about doing a 'good job'. The one thing he had going for him, the silver lining of it all, was Techno agreeing to build another fort when they got home to do their homework. He'd shot him a message asking to do it when he realized he wanted to punch something so bad his chest burned to release fire. Techno probably knew the exact feeling, and that was comforting. He'd get through the day at school, fire kept at bay, and maybe Techno would be proud of him for it.

And then came lunch.

He didn't remember how it had started exactly. He'd been sitting at the table, food perfectly untouched on his tray as he listened to Ranboo talk- well brag about his mom's cooking. His posture was straighter than Ben Shapiro's sexuality, hand clenched around a plastic fork like he was still deluding himself he could eat. Tubbo's eyes were on him when it happened.

They'd shared a table with a group they'd never sat next to before; upperclassmen Tommy didn't bother knowing. He wouldn't have known anything was wrong if it hadn't been for Tubbo's face. He'd gone from a painfully blank face, apathetic like he'd been all day (seriously if Tommy didn't know better he'd say Tubbo was a zombie), to the hint of a grimace, eyes widening a fraction as he stared at Tommy.

Tommy raised a brow, wondering what could have emotion finally peeking on Tubbo's face after seeming like he was on a whole other planet all day. It was one glance, the flickering of Tubbo's eyes at the guy sitting next to him, then the clenched jaw as he forced himself to look like nothing was wrong.

Tommy looked at the guy, watching his ugly mouth form the words.

Of course, he'd heard them, but it took him far too long to realize the absolute audacity of the guy was real and wasn't his imagination.

“Oh yeah, the one with the pink hair?” His friend asked, oblivious to Tommy’s eyes boring into his soul.

There was only one damn person in school with pink fucking hair.

“Yeah, that one. He’s just kind of weird.”

His mouth opened, Tubbo shooting him a look that he ignored. “What do you mean weird?” He interrupted, weirdly calm.

Both of the guys turned to him, looking surprised like Tommy hadn’t been blatantly listening in on the conversation for the past minute.

“Tommy doesn’t.” Ranboo hissed, the story about mac and cheese that sounded like good pussy long forgotten.

Tommy was glad no one knew who he was because the guy never would’ve said what he did otherwise.

“Come on, you haven’t heard of him? The Craft’s?” The guy laughed like it was something funny,

Well, he had, vague talking and tense looks from his friends whenever it happened. But he’d definitely heard what they were saying earlier, the nastiest the rumors had ever gotten. But he wondered if they’d repeat it.

Tommy’s hand curled into a fist under the table, and he swore his jaw cracked from how hard he was clenching it. “No.” He said, eyes already narrowed in on the stupid smirk of the upperclassmen.

“Dude, they’re like notorious. Techno’s the big dude always walking around looking like he wants to kill someone,”

“Probably has,” Another one of his friends chimed in, and they all laughed like it was funny.

“He’s the reason we have shorter passing periods, got into fights all the time.”

“No shit, he rolls with Dream and his crew.”

“Not anymore,” One of them added around a mouth full of spaghetti, sauce dripping down on his chin. “They aren’t even seen in the same class together. Rumor has it he got arrested that one spring break for beating the shit out of Fundy. They kicked him out cause nobody could tolerate his ass.”

One of the guys’ friends hit him in the side. “Yeah right, that’s total bullshit.” He leaned close to Tommy, voice lowered like they were going to be overheard by someone important. “He came back from break, knuckles busted *and*” His eyes shot around, his friend leaning in closer to listen as well. “Wilbur was beat to hell and back,”

“Holy fuck, I forgot about that, who beats their own brother?” Red shirt asked appalled.

Tommy's lungs sparked.

"I mean can you blame him?" Spaghetti guy asked with an amused snort. "Wilbur Craft? It's a miracle he didn't kill him, fucker was practically bouncing off the walls and he had to *live* with him."

The heat of anger flooded him, but he remained perfectly still exhaling embers.

"Thank god he graduated, I can't believe he even got in college."

Embers roared into a flame, and the flame stole the oxygen from his lungs.

"He barely graduated. Let's be real he probably dropped out already, dude's a total fuck up--"

And that had been it, with no more oxygen left in his lungs, the fire exploded free. One minute Tommy was sitting, and the next his lunch tray full of food was rocketing towards Spaghetti and knocking him right in the face. In one swift movement, he was climbing over the table, vision flooded by the red of flames, shaking in pure rage. His knuckles split open on red shirt's nose, a satisfying crunch proceeding the shout. But red shirt was quicker, and he got a solid punch on his cheek, snapping Tommy's neck to the side with a painful twinge.

Ranboo's fist in his collar dragged him across the table and out of the way of the next punch coming his way. The cafeteria erupted into shouting as he was pulled into his friend's chest, held tight by his long arms. But the damage had been done, red shirt lunged at them despite Ranboo's rapid-fired apologies. Tommy snarled, struggling to get free from Ranboo's deathly grip and yearning to pummel Red Shirt.

"You stupid fuck!"

Ranboo's arms budged just a bit, and Tommy reckoned he could throw a punch if the other got close enough and he readied when-

Red shirt never made it to them, in a blur he was tackled by someone much shorter. Tubbo wrestled with him on the ground, curses spewing from his mouth.

He'd never seen Tubbo look so furious, having gone from 0 to 100 within seconds. Heaving breaths of fire in Ranboo's arms, watching Tubbo go absolutely ham on Red Shirt as a crowd formed, Tommy realized Techno definitely wasn't going to be proud of him when he got home.

All he could smell was gasoline.

—

He'd zoned out as Phil had been briefed on the phone, looking at the way Tubbo had a smile stuck on his face despite his busted lip. It was the first smile of the day for him, but Tommy didn't find any satisfaction in this one. It was all wrong.

The principal sighed, having finished lecturing an unresponsive Tommy before turning to Tubbo. "Now Mr.Net, I never expected this from you. I understand you're going through

tough times with the-”

The smile fell at the words, and it was just as the office door opened and Philza walked in.

His eyes frantically looked around the room until they landed on Tommy’s face and the frozen bottle of water held to his cheek.

“Ah, Mr. Craft.” The principal said, not even pretending to sound like he was happy to see Philza.

“Boys, can I speak with the principal privately for a second?” Phil asked, looking about as unhappy as any adult being called to pick up a kid after a fight would be.

Tubbo and Tommy stood up quietly, Tommy following behind as Tubbo made his way out of the office and the dark wooden door shut heavily behind them. There was a line of chairs along the opposite wall and they quickly relocated to them. Tommy shifted in the uncomfortable plastic chair, trying to hold in how anxious he felt with the fact that he couldn’t hear anything from the office.

He kept replaying the fight over and over again, the feeling of anger, of skin under his fist, and the image of Tubbo far too happy beating the shit out of someone. But he couldn’t get the words out of his head. It seemed like everyone knew about the Craft’s, everyone but him.

“Why didn’t you tell me about the Craft’s?” Tommy asked, not even looking over at Tubbo.

“You seemed happy with them.” Was all Tubbo said.

Tommy adjusted the bottle over his throbbing cheek, feeling the ice inside begin to melt. “I am,” He said quietly, feet digging into the carpet as he slouched in the chair. “Why do people say all that shit about them, they’re nice.”

Tommy could feel Tubbo’s eyes on the side of his head. He hesitated before he answered, “It’s because they’re Craft’s.”

The plastic of the bottle crinkled under Tommy’s grip. “Well, what the fuck does that mean? I’m tired of everyone but me being in on some secret bullshit when I’m the one who lives with them!” He pressed the water bottle too hard into the bruise, hissing as the pain lit up the side of his face. Sure, he was probably taking his anger out at the wrong person. The family wouldn’t tell him anything, and his own damn friends wouldn’t, and it made him want to punch a hole through something. He was fucking worried, and it was an awful terrible thing.

He shoved the water bottle in his lap, turning to glare at Tubbo. “Tell me,” He demanded.

Luckily Tubbo didn’t seem phased by the question, and he just nodded before he turned his body as much as he could in the chair to better face Tommy. “There’s a lot of rumors around them, but I can tell you what I know is true.”

“Alright, fine,” Tommy said, gesturing his hand forward to prompt Tubbo to hurry.

Tubbo licked some of the blood off his lip before he spoke. “Wilbur was the most notorious. Everyone was interested in a new kid showing up in town, and it didn’t help that he was a uh-well.” Tubbo paused, looking like he was trying to figure out how to phrase it which had Tommy on edge. Tubbo was always blunt.

“A what?” Tommy asked, annoyed.

“A- Well you know, he was-”

The office door opened, and Tubbo’s mouth snapped shut. Tommy almost screamed in frustration, but the look on Phil’s face had him immediately tensing. He walked right past the line of chairs, arm gesturing for Tommy to follow along. “Come on,” He said, and Tommy couldn’t tell if he was mad.

He sprung up, giving Tubbo a look who just waved pleasantly at him before he was gone.

This was going to be more painful than getting punched.

—

Philza’s plush SUV was a lot spacier than Wilbur’s car, Tommy had plenty of room to stretch out his legs in the front seat. Plenty of things and neat features to look at instead of Phil’s tense face.

“The principal said you started the fight, is that true?” Phil asked, interrupting the soft classical jazz playing on the radio.

Tommy worried his lip and wished he could just push a button and eject himself from the car like he was batman. “Yeah,” He said instead, picturing what his body would look like after being propelled from a car going 45 miles an hour and splattering on the ground. Probably fucked up enough that Phil wouldn’t pry anymore into the situation.

“And your friend Tubbo backed you up?” Phil asked again, eyes glancing pointedly at Tommy who was desperately trying to look away.

“Yeah,” Tommy replied.

“Seems like a good friend, if a little misguided,” Phil said with a sigh, reaching over to turn the radio volume down just a bit.

Turning the car radio down during a conversation was never a good thing. Sam had the tendency to do that right before he decided to drop a bomb like, ‘they’re trying to relocate you into a facility, and we’re actually driving there right now, yay.’ Though the conversation hadn’t quite gone like that, Sam had been very monotone yet caring about it as he tended to be.

“He is,” Tommy said, remembering when Phil thought Tubbo may have been the one who peer pressured him. He really wasn’t setting a good track record for any of his friends, though that was his own fault.

“So, why’d you do it kid?” Phil asked bluntly.

Tommy froze, wondering if he should tell the truth. “What do you mean?” He asked playing dumb and looking over at Phil to see if he was finally going to be mad.

Phil didn’t look mad though, instead, he sent Tommy a curious glance. “Oh come on mate, you don’t just punch a kid for no reason.”

“Are you going to be mad?” Tommy asked.

“Did you commit a hate crime?”

Tommy gave Phil an offended look. “God no.”

“Then no, I’m not going to be mad.” Phil said sincerely, “Just want to know what I’m dealing with here so I can figure out how to help.”

The knots in Tommy’s stomach settled just a bit, and he relaxed in his seat. “They were saying mean things.” He knew he sounded like a pouting child, but he really did not want to repeat any of what was said.

Phil gave him a dark look, and of course, asked. “What kind of things?”

Tommy groaned, feeling the remnants from the heat of his anger flare. It felt like there was no getting out of the conversation, and he was tired of lying. “It’s was fucking stupid,” He said, not bothering to censor himself as the anger began to flow. “They were saying awful shit about Wil and Techno when I was right there!” Phil didn’t look surprised and it made Tommy feel a lot angrier. “They don’t live with them, so how would they know anything? It was dumb.”

For a few miles, they didn’t say anything until finally, Phil spoke.

“Next time, provoke them into hitting you first.”

Tommy’s head snapped to look over at Phil, wondering if he’d heard him properly. “What?”

“If- and only *if* you’re going to fight anyway. Don’t ever land the first hit, only land the last.”

“Oh,” Tommy said quietly, staring down in his lap as he felt something warm flood him.

“That’s only if you have to fight, I’d prefer if you didn’t. People are going to say stupid bullshit all the time, you gotta learn to walk away.” Phil’s brows furrowed and then he tacked on a hasty. “Violence is never the answer.”

“Right,” Timmy trailed off, thinking about how cliché the saying was. He thought back to the conversation, wondering what of it was true and what wasn’t. “Is that what you told Techno to get him to stop fighting?” He asked, studying Phil’s reaction carefully.

But Phil was an open book, and to Tommy’s surprise, he laughed. “No, that never worked. I just got him anger management classes.” Then he looked at Tommy, soft smile with not a hint

of maliciousness in his expression. “I can put you in some if you’d like, or therapy?”

Tommy shook his head, nose scrunching at the idea. The last time he’d seen a ‘therapist’ they’d recorded everything he said, and it felt like they were trying to get him to say certain things; confess to certain things. “No, I’m good.”

“Alright, but the offer is always open.” Phil turned the radio back up, signaling the end of the serious conversation. “Now, how about some ice cream before I take you home and we can watch a forty-minute violence PSA?”

“We?”

“Felt too cruel to make you suffer on your own.”

—

Philza hadn’t been kidding about the forty-minute violence PSA, but it really just turned into them making fun of the actors and terrible editing over melted ice cream. All in all, it’d been great, at least until Phil had to head back to work. He’d given Tommy a stern look, telling him not to get into any trouble else he’d be assigned a babysitter. He was a big man, he didn’t need a babysitter. Besides, he’d had enough of the day, if anything he was going to be at his best behavior.

So when Phil left, leaving him two hours to be alone until the others came, he decided to nap. It was almost easier to hit the pillow and instantly fall asleep when he knew the house was empty. It’s not that he didn’t like the others being home, but the feeling of incredible unease when he could hear footsteps was so ingrained he didn’t think it was going anywhere. So he took advantage of it, laying down and immediately passing out.

He woke up to soft rapping at his door; he didn’t have time to panic before the door was opening and Techno was walking in. His footsteps sounded heavier than usual, but Tommy tried to not think too much about it. He surprised himself when he didn’t bat an eye at the presence of the other.

“What’s up?” He mumbled, the heavy hands of sleep still clinging to him.

“Homework.”

Tommy hummed in response, shutting his eyes and relaxing as he heard the sound of papers shuffling and Techno taking up residence on the floor. It was a few blissful minutes of letting his mind bumble around with the now familiar sounds of Techno’s soft breaths and pencil led scratching on paper. Until suddenly, something occurred to Tommy. His eyes shot open and he turned to look at Techno.

“What time is it?” He asked.

“Five past four,”

His brows scrunched as he thought about it, “You always go to the gym early Friday,” Then he was sitting up, glaring at the back of Techno’s head. “What are you doing here?”

Techno was unbothered, instead taking his sweet time to do an equation on his calculator, head leaned comfortably against the side of the mattress without a care in the world. "Homework you fool," He answered, only after scribbling something down on his paper.

He stared intensely at Techno, foggy brain starting to come online with the speed of a garden snail. Techno never came in to do homework until much later, and he was loathe to even be late to the gym. He'd never really skipped it entirely, not unless something was really wrong. Had something gone wrong today?

He spent some time in quiet thought just observing the way Techno worked. There did seem to be an undercurrent of something that had him minutely tense, but Tommy couldn't place what it was. His jaw was tense, and maybe the grip on his pencil was harsher than usual, but he didn't think there was a reason for Techno to be angry.

The memories of the day came back to him, and it had him pausing.

"Did Phil tell you?" He blurted, watching how the pencil stopped almost a bit too harshly for comfort.

Techno turned his head just a bit, looking entirely unamused and that was answer enough. But the scorching heat of annoyance in Techno's usually peaceful green eyes had Tommy tensing. He was definitely not happy, so Phil definitely told him what happened. He cursed silently to himself, wondering if Phil had been kind enough to revoke some details or if he'd thought it just punishment to lay it all bare.

He wasn't entirely sure how to handle someone who was mad, he didn't exactly have a great track record with it. It either ended up in fists flying or some combination of running and hiding with skill that rivaled Usain Bolt. He figured there was a 99% chance he wasn't going to have to deal with any of that with Techno, despite whatever bullshit the people at school said. He was different now.

At least Tommy could think that. But since it was said, no matter how hard he tried to get it from his brain, he wondered. It was almost a habit, worrying if someone was a physical threat or not, judging how much he could push before they hurt him. He hadn't felt particularly unsafe with Techno, but that was uneasy in itself. What if he was wrong? What were the chances of this being different, of Techno being different from the rest?

Techno had said he'd gotten into fights, and from the details of the conversation earlier, well, it wasn't pretty.

Did that extend to him though?

He had to know.

Momentarily he debated shooting a text to Wilbur to ask what to do, but he already had enough on his plate. Tommy could be a big man and handle interpersonal situations on his own, it was easy. Though he did feel bad for it, not having that implicit trust.

"You're mad." He said bluntly, this time anticipating how tense Techno would get.

He didn't respond, and maybe in another life, Tommy would just leave it at that. It was clear that he didn't want to talk about it, maybe he was still processing it, or maybe he preferred to deal with anger in a different way. But that Tommy, was not this Tommy.

Call it sick curiosity, but he wanted to see how far he could push Techno. He wanted to rest assured knowing that he could judge the limits, stay on the right side of it with a clean conscious. Nobody in the house would hit him, supposedly, but that didn't stop him from worrying about it. He had to know what he was working with, and with Techno, he really didn't.

He wiggled, shifting obnoxiously until he could drop his head over the side of the bed. He grunted, trying to get as comfortable as he could hanging upside down. He could see the side of Techno's face now at least, so he did his best to make eye contact with Techno.

Techno who did not look the least bit happy with how loud the ordeal of Tommy moving had been. His jaw was clenched hard now, and Tommy could hear almost the practiced breaths Techno was now taking as if to calm himself.

He opened his big mouth anyway, volume already pitched far too high for someone right next to Techno,

"Is this because-"

The paper crumpled like nothing in Techno's fist, and Tommy mourned the teacher who would be receiving crumpled homework to grade. They really didn't get paid enough for that.

Techno was staring straight across from him, still not meeting Tommy's eyes. He didn't need to though to send shivers down Tommy's spine with how heated the look was. Emotionally he steadied himself, reminding himself that Techno wouldn't hurt him.

Well, probably wouldn't.

"So," He said, drawing out the word as he braced himself. "Is that a yes?"

"No." Techno snapped and for as hard as it seemed sometimes for Techno to say more than a few sentences, that one word looked like pulling teeth.

He was quiet when he was angry, and that was terrifying. Far worse than yelling or shouting, at least in his experience. People who didn't waste breath on screaming always hit harder.

Tommy's hands got clammy, and he was glad Techno wouldn't see how they shook in their grip on the sheets. He knew he should stop, that it was unfair to do something so manipulative, testing someone. He was playing with fire, but he'd never been great with knowing when to stop.

"Really?" He asked, hoping none of his timidity would show through. "Because it seems like this is about-"

If fire was green then it would look just like Techno's eyes, challenging, blazing, and bright.

“Tommy,” He said, and the sheer authority in his voice had him reeling. “I don’t want to talk about it,”

Don’t push it, he thought.

Just listen to him.

“Well, I do.”

“Drop it.” He said, with a tone of finality.

Tommy waited for a second, observing how tense Techno seemed. The tips of his ears were turning red, and he’d subconsciously leaned away from him. His things were long forgotten and it seemed like he was using all his energy to stay calm. He knew he should stop, and respect Techno’s boundaries, but he was *almost* there.

“But-”

All Tommy saw in warning was his fist clenching, and then Techno was standing up. He froze, heart in his throat as he waited for the inevitable, a sick sense of familiarity settling deep in him.

And then his entire perspective was shifting, *literally*. One moment he was on the bed and the next he was staring into Techno’s back as he was thrown over his shoulder.

Immediately his hands were coming up to grab onto Techno’s shirt, blinking hard like the image would fade into one that made more sense. Techno said nothing, instead, he was heading towards the door, grip firm on Tommy so he wouldn’t jostle as much.

Now Tommy had been forcefully relocated before, usually dragged, not carried, but the sensation was a bit of the same. His hands knotted into the fabric of Techno’s shirt, wondering what was about to happen. He was a hundred percent about to be bodied. He had brief flashes of being dragged down steps, the anger that had broken the camel’s back and left him on the grungy garage floor.

Maybe he’d been right.

He’d barely had the thought before he recognized the familiar messy floor, a staple of Wil’s room.

“Techno, Tommy, what-” Wilbur sounded just as confused as he felt.

As easy as he’d been picked up, he was being hefted back, world tipping as he almost took Techno’s shirt with him. One minute he was upside down and the next he was bouncing onto mattress and bone, only stopped from a warm chest. Wil groaned, recoiling as Tommy was dumped practically into his arms, right on top of one of his bent legs and music notes.

Tommy barely had time to scramble himself up before Wil was ripping his leg from underneath him.

“God, what the fuck Techno,” He complained, jostling Tommy as he pushed him around in his arms to get the crumpled music sheets from underneath him.

Tommy just froze, staring at Techno who loomed above them both looking pissed. Wilbur seemed to finally notice, staring up at his brother from behind Tommy’s shoulder. Tommy didn’t move from the safety between Wil’s legs, actively leaning back into him as he met Techno’s sharp green glare.

“He’s pissing me off,” Techno said, struggling with every word he spoke.

If the atmosphere was a little lighter then he would’ve laughed at the way Wil’s arms came up instinctively to pull Tommy further into him and away from Techno.

“Ok,” Wil said, and Tommy was gladly letting him handle the communication. “Did you have to storm in here and throw the child at me?”

“I’m not a child,” Tommy muttered quietly, sentence falling flat at the way Techno’s stare focused back on him.

Wil’s arms tightened around him.

Techno opened his mouth, like he wanted to speak, but shut it and instead went back to glaring. Every time his gaze moved though, it was quick to go right back to the space between Tommy’s eyes. The one time it fell on the bruise on his cheek, his expression shut down, and it was the same look he had that time Tommy had cut himself in the kitchen. Things slowly started to click into sense.

“Fuck, you’re actually mad,” Wil cursed, deeming the situation serious enough to drop all jokes. “Shit, should I call Dad?” He blurted, and Tommy had a sinking feeling of guilt. “Where are you on the scale, is this a ‘I need to workout’ level bad, or ‘I’m about to beat the shit out of everyone’ bad? Do you need to do some breathing exercises?”

Wil’s words seemed to fall on deaf ears because Techno didn’t bother to respond. It was at this moment in time Tommy’s stupid little brain decided it was best to jump in and speak.

“I’m sorry,” He blurted, just wanting the anger to fade, hoping for his mistakes to disappear.

If Techno was mad before, then he was livid now. He went from unnervingly still, to pacing holes on Wilbur’s carpet. For a moment he was worried a fire might start from the sheer friction of it, but he figured one had already metaphorically been started.

“Tech,” Wil urged, sounding like he wanted to go over to his brother but refraining from doing so. “What happened?”

Techno turned, so suddenly Tommy flinched back as far as he could, which was basically until Wil wouldn’t budge.

Unbothered king, he thought as he basically curled into Wil’s chest like a scared animal.

“I’m going to kill someone,” Techno said, and Tommy swore he could see blood leaking out from the palms of his clenched fists. His own blood long since gone cold at the conviction in Techno’s voice.

“Oookay,” Wil said, legs moving to get out from Tommy. “Let’s not get ahead of ourselves here.” He tried to pry himself off Tommy, despite the grip Tommy had on his sleeve.

If Wil left he no longer had a meat shield.

He gave Tommy’s arm a squeeze before he was rising from the bed, ripping away from him and leaving him exposed to the world. He scooted back on the bed as subtly as he could, back meeting the wall as he watched Wil get in front of Techno and placatingly hold his hands up. He wouldn’t do that if he was Wil, but maybe he had a death wish.

He watched the brothers have the stare down of their life, Techno looking like a lion about to pounce.

He was already preparing the eulogy he’d speak at Wilbur’s funeral if he wasn’t being buried with him that is.

“Why don’t we use our words?” Wil said finally, voice soft and dewy like honey.

“I’ll kill those too,” Techno snapped.

“I can’t help if I don’t know what happened,” Wil pushed, ignoring the absolute daggers Techno was shooting at him.

“He’s,” Techno’s fists clenched and unclenched.

“Annoying?” Tommy supplied, helpfully.

If looks could kill he wouldn’t even be six feet under, he’d be in the seventh circle of hell right in the ice next to Satan himself.

“Shut up, Tommy,” Techno said.

Tommy’s mouth clicked shut and he wished he could call Phil, but his phone was still in the room and he didn’t think his work would appreciate another interruption anyway. Wil shuffled in front of Tommy a bit more, hand behind his back making a swiping motion that clearly meant ‘shut the fuck up’. He felt like he was in a cage with a very angry lion, and Techno’s pacing and glaring was not helping.

“If this is a too angry to talk moment, I can take you to the gym. You can kill a punching bag and everything will be fine.” Wil said, taking a step closer to his brother.

God bless Wil, let him be happy when Techno sends him straight to heaven.

“Look at his *face*,” Techno snarled, lip curled back and gesturing at Tommy even though he couldn’t even look at the bruise himself.

Wilbur's head turned and his eyes snapped almost immediately to Tommy's cheek. Wilbur's expression flickered between emotions too fast for Tommy to catch. "Oh," He said, blankly, before he was glaring at Tommy too. "Wait, what the fuck happened to his face?"

He took everything back, he wasn't in a cage with a lion, he was in a cage with two.

"It's nothing-"

"He got into a *fight*," Techno spat like the word was the foulest thing he'd tasted.

Wilbur looked back to Techno. "Why?"

Techno threw his hands up, the most expressive he'd ever seen him. "Like I'd know, it's not like he called me."

And then the weight of the promise he wanted to forget was crushing him along with the stares of his very angry foster brothers. He hoped the wall would cave and he'd fall right through and away from them. He could almost see it, the expression of Techno's face changing as words sat on the edge of his tongue. He didn't know what it was, but he felt dread over it before he even opened his mouth

"It's not the first time," Techno said, and Tommy's heart stopped.

He could almost feel the bruises on his wrist tingle.

He wouldn't,

They had mutual respect.

He wouldn't tell.

He'd promised.

"What?" Wilbur repeated again, this time his gaze pinning Tommy painfully to his spot.

But then again, he kinda broke his promise.

He waited with bated breath, staring at Techno and pleading to the best of his ability he'd just shut up. He could feel himself begin to shake, and he shoved his hands under his thighs to hide it. Wilbur had gone from staring Techno down to looking at him, and he couldn't see his expression.

'Don't' he mouthed, but Techno looked nonpulsed.

"He got into a fight at the party too, he has bruises."

Two things happened at once, Tommy's lungs filled with the scent of gasoline, and his eyes flickered from the door to Techno who currently stood in front of it. He wanted out of the conversation already, but his only exit was blocked.

Tommy didn't react well to being trapped. It brought memories of cold concrete, flame and his fist slamming into Dream's nose. As much as he liked to think the kid with cuffs around his wrist was different than the one who had movie nights with the Craft's, they were one in the same.

"You fuck," He cursed, no longer cowering against the wall but leaning forward with newfound anger.

Wilbur and everything else in the room faded from view, and his vision tunneled in on one pink jackass.

"What is your problem?" He asked brow raised like a taunt.

"Tomm-"

Techno cut Wil off.

"Why did I have to hear what happened from Dad?"

Tommy scowled, confusion and anger blazing in his gut. "Why the fuck would I have to tell you?"

And he knew the answer, he knew he'd basically spat on the mutual understanding they had formed. He'd looked Techno's deal right in the face and fucked off with it. But he hadn't wanted to tell Techno. Not when it would mean explaining the rumors, explaining how he was hurt they were hiding things from him.

No, that was embarrassing.

Techno took a step forward, fist clenched like he'd rather have it around Tommy's throat.

"Is it the same person?" He asked, and Tommy was thrown through a loop.

"What?" He asked flatly.

Techno's eyes narrowed on him like he was honing in on prey.

"Is someone messing with you?"

Then it clicked.

"No, fuck no!" He said, almost wanting to laugh at the misunderstanding. "It was some stupid asshole at lunch,"

But neither of them looked like they believed him and it made him burn brighter.

"Why did you have to fight someone? Why would you be in a situation where you would have to do that?" Wilbur asked, and he faded back into view.

He looked so lost. His eyebrows were furrowed, and he looked at Tommy like he was trying to see something just past his skin. It was worse than looking at Techno. He could handle anger, he was used to it, but the broken concern on Wil's face was too much. *It burned.*

It didn't help that the truth boiled on his tongue, and burned bright in his lungs. The question was hitting far too close to home, and it had him so defensive he shook with it. He'd been casual about the whole thing, dealing with Dream and his crew daily, the heavy history that preceded them. But seeing how it was a big deal, how simple bruises were enough to have his foster brothers in a rage, it was too much.

He hated it.

Because how was he supposed to keep telling himself it wasn't a big deal if they were acting as it mattered?

Like he mattered.

"Tommy," Wil pushed.

But it was Techno's anger, faltering for the slightest moment, giving way to the briefest bit of pleading, of care; that made him snap.

"It was just stupid bullshit!" He shouted, shoulders rising to his ears because of how distrustful they looked. "I wouldn't have been in a fight if it wasn't for you!" He could see the confusion, even the hurt on their faces but he pushed on. "Everyone talks about you, everyone! I don't even fucking know why, or if it's even the truth," All the anger he'd bottled up, the hurt from them keeping secrets, reared its ugly head. "Was I just supposed to listen to him fucking talk about you guys like that?! It doesn't even matter, because I might've defended you and it could've all been true! Maybe they were fucking right!"

He choked on the anger, trying to ignore the blood rushing in his ears. He wanted to feel relief, but when the molten anger broke, all that was left was the cold touch of hurt. He hated it, hated being vulnerable, being hurt.

"How would I even know, if you don't fucking tell me anything," He said finally, "One minute it feels like you want me here, and the next you don't." He willed the lump in his throat away, disgusted by how pathetic he sounded. "So just- Just make up your damn mind."

"Tommy-"

He stood, pushing past Wil and ignoring the sour look of guilt on his face. He didn't even falter as he brushed past Techno, who had gone from mad to still the second Tommy had explained what had happened.

He almost left the room, but something like guilt had him stopping in the doorway.

He'd lied to them about a lot, and yet he expected the truth from them. How could he judge them for looking at him with distrust when he knew how much he was keeping? But somehow, it still hurt, it still bothered him.

“His name was Quackity,” He said, grip tight on the wood of the door. “So if there’s someone you want to kill, go fuck with him. But I’m not the one you should be mad at,” He glared at Techno from over his shoulder, unable to recognize what expression was reflecting back at him. “I’m not lying-” ‘Not this time.’ He thought.

“I’m sorry,” He spat, knowing he’d mean it more later. “I need to cool down,”

And then he was out the door, heading to his room to attempt to calm down.

He’d reached for his phone, picking it off the floor where it had fallen. It sucked that even in this moment, with guilt and hurt crushing him, he still felt connected to them. He wanted to listen to one of the songs Wil liked, the one he liked to play on bad days.

His thumb froze on the screen when he unlocked his phone.

Dream

I want to apologize in person

I’ll be at your house around 1am

If you don’t want me to come I won’t

It’d been sent thirty minutes ago.

Tommy sent a quick reply, already planning the best way to get out of the house.

—

At the very least he’d hoped Dream wouldn’t have parked somewhere obvious in front of the house, but he’d done worse.

He’d parked his brand new tesla like a serial killer.

It was hidden from view, way down the driveway, and covered by the trees. Tommy had to use his phone as a flashlight, sticking to the side of the road in case someone decided to look out the window for whatever reason. He was tense in the silence of the moon, thinking about how fucking dark it was out.

He didn’t relax until he was in the passenger seat, staring at Dream’s yellowed bruise and guilty green eyes.

“Tommy, I’m sorry-”

“Yeah yeah, shut the fuck up,” He reached forward fiddling with the radio to try and get the soft sound of music to trickle through. He looked back at Dream, who god, looked genuinely apologetic. It was too much. “Look I’ve had a shit day, I don’t even know why I agreed to get in a fucking car with you again,” His hands buried themselves in his hoodie pocket, the soft staticy sound from the radio warming him up more than the heater could. “But here I am,”

“I know, you shouldn’t have,” Dream said, looking away from Tommy to stare sadly at the wheel. “What happened to your face?” He asked quietly,

“Got into a fight; None of your business,” Tommy said.

Dream thankfully didn’t push the issue.

“Why’d you do it?” He asked after a bout of silence, glancing at Dream from the corner of his eye.

Dude looked a bit like a mess, but far better than he had that night. Much more subdued and present, not a sliver of bloodshot in his eyes.

He was expecting a half-ass excuse, so what he got in response was not what he was ready for.

“I think I’m just like my dad,” He said, and his eyes had dropped from the wheel to the hands fiddling in his lap.

It was just a couple of words, but they were drenched in a density greater than gold. He could feel the way they sunk into the air, seeming to plummet right into his gut, leaving a trail neither party could ignore. Tommy squirmed a bit in his seat. He wasn’t sure if he was ready for another heavy conversation today. Dream hadn’t had to say much, but the intensity and implication in the few words he used had Tommy feeling like he was preparing to jump.

“What-” He tried to ignore the way his voice fluctuated on the word. “Does he also try and murder-suicide his buddies on the highway?” He joked, but the absolute defeat on Dream’s face stole any lightheartedness from him.

God fucking damn it.

Any relic of hope he had that the conversation might not be so tough was buried deep under the earth, and he wasn’t an archaeologist.

“He’s a piece of shit,” Dream admitted quietly, skin peeling away to unearth beads of blood on his thumb.

Tommy barely nodded, hoping to look encouraging enough so that Dream wouldn’t shut him out, but not too encouraging that he’d feel forced to divulge more than he was comfortable with.

“He’s worse when he’s drunk,” He stopped picking at his skin then, head turning up to look at the roof of the car like someone would be staring back, ready to take over the conversation

for him. "Thought if I didn't drink I wouldn't be the same- But I guess it just runs in the family." He laughed but there was no humor in it at all.

Tommy's chest tightened at the sound and he didn't know what to say, he wasn't even sure he could say anything. So he let the radio play between them instead, watching Dream's thumb get more and more bloody until he was reaching out. He hesitated before he pried the hand from Dream, glad there was no resistance.

The blood smeared on his own hand, but he didn't care.

Dream looked at him, an expression so heavy with guilt and regret Tommy almost looked away. His clammy hand tightened around Dream's, giving it what he hoped was a reassuring squeeze.

"Don't take this badly, but-" He paused, dry mouth working around words the best it could. "I think I'm only ever going to be friends with sober you,"

Dream laughed, but it was a quiet and wet sound. "That's valid," He murmured.

"I don't know what the hell you were on, but I don't ever want to see you like that again." His throat closed up, words that didn't want to come uprising. But Dream's hand was warm in his own so he spoke to them anyway, "It was terrifying, I didn't- I couldn't recognize you."

"It wasn't me," Dream insisted, looking a bit more present than he had been since Tommy stepped into the car. "I promise that's not who I am, I don't know- I just, when I'm high it's like-" He struggled with the words, looking away from Tommy to worry his lip. "I'm just not me. I get so- so angry." He took a shuddering breath, and Tommy squeezed his hand again. "I feel just like him."

He let go of Dream, hand returning to the comfort of his own pocket. "Maybe don't get high," He said, knowing it was way more complex than that.

"Yeah, I'm trying,"

He let the soft weight of silence fall between them. It settled upon them, not oppressive though not quite comfortable. Though it felt necessary to let it sit between them, blanketing the raw edges of the wounds reopened from the conversation. The trickle of music from the radio lightened his lungs, unfurling his stress. He recognized the rhythm, falling into the pattern and beat like he was coming home.

Wil liked the song, he always turned the volume up when it came on.

"Was that all you wanted to talk about?" He asked, hoping to chase off the slivers of regret and worry beginning to grab hold of him.

He could see Dream hesitate, caught in something he just couldn't see. He released the grip he had on his own hands, turning to look at Tommy with a timid smile. "Well- You're not exactly going to like it,"

Tommy rolled his eyes, "Cheers," he murmured, "Just hit me with it."

The day couldn't get any worse, it was already jam-packed with shit.

Dream's lips cracked open with a wry smile, "George-"

Tommy groaned, watching his own plan of distraction burn up and fail. "Oh my god, don't start that shit around me."

"It's quick, he just wanted me to give you something," Dream said like he was trying to be reassuring though his nervousness fractured the tone in his voice. "But I don't have-"

"So, you know then?" Tommy interrupted, surprised by the amount of apathy he felt toward it at the moment. "About my record, the- the fucking blackmailing with George?"

Dream tensed, mouth clicking shut as he stared at Tommy like a deer in the headlights. All Tommy had to see was the bit of guilt mixing with the green in his eyes, and he knew the answer. His gut twisted violently, and he couldn't help but feel vulnerable; a wound that probably would never heal was ripped from the bandages and exposed.

No one ever should've found out, especially not a friend.

He didn't have to ask, he could see it in the way Dream was avoiding his eyes, but he did anyway. More of a realization than a question.

"You read it," He said, voice taking on the familiar monotone of his foster brother. His emotions were stripped bare, and nothing was left.

"I-" Dream began, looking like he didn't want to say anything more because he was uncomfortable. Tommy thought it was ironic, how he was squirming in his seat like he was the one whose name was on the record. "I did," He admitted quietly.

Tommy scoffed, feeling anger so small yet hot prickle just below his skin.

Finally, Dream looked at him again, something disgusting like pity in his eyes. "Listen I get it- Things like that- They never look good on paper, and you probably didn't mean to-"

"It's right," He snapped, letting just a bit of the anger rise before it faded. "There's no-" His teeth dug into his cheek, a failed attempt to restrain the words. He didn't have to be honest, he didn't have to tell the truth. If Dream wanted to think of him in a good light, he should just let it-

"There's no fucking sugarcoating it," He could taste ruin on his tongue, but the relief of speaking the words out loud for the first time washed it out; it was invigorating. "I wanted to," His hands curled around each other, and he was thankful he didn't have long nails anymore. "I liked it,"

He stared at Dream, wondering if this would be the moment he was kicked out. If Dream would actually be the one to expose his secret, right here and right now. He had every right to, it was probably the smart thing to do.

Fortunately or unfortunately, Dream didn't move to kick him out. He just looked confused, studying Tommy like he was a bug under a microscope he'd never seen before. If Tommy looked hard enough he could see the flash of disgust before it was gone.

"But the charges," He trailed off, eyes unfocusing like he was remembering everything on Tommy's file word for word.

"They're incorrect," Tommy supplied, something he'd barely even admit to himself on the worst of nights. "I got lucky, they built a case they knew would get me free without caring if it was true or not." He looked out at the dark of the night just beyond the windshield, it didn't look so dark when he could feel sick emotions twisting just beyond his beating heart. "The judge was stupid, and I was lucky."

Dream's face scrunched, putting the pieces together in his own head. "So you- You got off scot-free?"

Tommy looked back at him, not enough energy to make an expression at the words. "Yeah," He paused, something dark curling in his throat. "Something like that,"

Dream looked away, and Tommy gave him the time for it. He was so tired of everything, of worrying. He should've been anxious that a friend found out, but instead he was weirdly calm. It was almost a nice feeling, releasing words he'd never thought he'd speak, at least not sober apparently.

"You-" Dream stuttered, every inch of his expression reflecting the conflict he was having. Faced with who he thought Tommy was, and the truth. "You must've had a reason," He said finally, filled with so much hope it made Tommy sick.

He grinned, but it didn't reach his eyes. "Doesn't everyone?"

Dream frowned, but surprisingly he didn't look scared. "I knew you were kind of fucked up, but-" He snorted, rolling his eyes. "I guess you do fit right in," And then he was perking up in his seat, turning to grab something from the back of the car like his whole perspective on Tommy hadn't just shifted.

Maybe Tommy would feel relief at the acceptance later, but now he just felt empty.

The second Dream pulled the fresh-looking box from the floor, Tommy knew what was about to happen.

"You've got to be fucking kidding me," He said, making no move to grab the box even as Dream pushed it into his lap. "I'm not taking these, it's tacky," He said, firmly.

Dream snorted like he'd just heard an inside joke.

"What?" Tommy asked,

"Open it and I'll tell you," Dream bargained.

With a sigh, he was looking down at the box. His fingers ran over the cardboard, the feeling of his sweat sticking to it was gross. He lifted the lid like he was ripping a bandaid, scowling down as the fresh scent of new shoes and rubber hit him. He threw the lid to the floor, staring down at the red shoes hidden just behind their paper wrappings.

Dream might as well have handed him a giant sign that said ‘George’s bitch’

“This is so fucked up,” He said, uncaring that Dream would hear him as he pulled one of the vans out. Just like all the others, the brand was replaced with a smiley, something that mocked him as he felt around the red canvas.

He sighed, dropping it back in the box and turning to look at Dream.

“You’re laughing because you knew I’d hate it?”

Dream shook his head, something painfully nostalgic and soft reflecting in his eyes. “No it just- It reminded me of something,”

Tommy raised a brow, “Spill before I throw these out,”

“George will just keep buying them,” Dream said, and somehow Tommy knew it was true.

They had a stare-off until finally the senior caved.

“You called them tacky,” He muttered, words filled with weight Tommy didn’t quite understand.

“Because they’re tacky as shit, why are you losing it?” He smirked, despite the stone that had settled in his stomach since he saw the box. “You offended?”

“No- it’s just-” And Dream looked conflicted, before a decision formed on his face. “Techno said the same thing about them,”

The breath left Tommy’s lungs and he couldn’t stop his fingers from digging into the cardboard. He stared down at the red vans, remembering the worn pink ones he’d found in his foster brother’s closet. There’d been blood spattered on them, blood that Techno didn’t even bother to clean off like he couldn’t bear to bring himself to touch them.

Techno didn’t like blood, he hated it, and yet the shoes were covered in it. Grimy and scuffed, like he’d been a whole other person when he’d worn them.

“I thought you said you didn’t know him well,” Tommy said, fingers dancing across the rough red canvas of the shoes like he could picture the blood on them instead.

Dream shifted, reaching over to remove some of the paper from the box to fully uncover the shoes. “I didn’t know him,” He said, and something in his tone sounded like the truth but not quite.

Tommy looked over at him, wishing he could just read the truth from his face.

“I’ll be gone soon,” He said, “Why give me the shoes?”

Dream worried on his lower lip, hand pulling back and barely brushing past Tommy’s bruised wrist. “Tradition.” He said. “If you’re out it identifies you as one of us; it’s safer that way.”

He frowned down at the shoes. “These might as well be a fucking target,”

“No one is going to fuck with you if you have those on,” Dream said firmly, an edge of protection rough in his voice. “People *know* what happens if you touch one of us,”

“Yeah, and Techno is going to know I’m one of you,” His mouth curled around the last few words, the stone heavier in his stomach.

“Don’t wear them around him,” Dream said like it was simple. “The Craft’s-”

“Are what?” Tommy interrupted shoes long forgotten as he glared at Dream. “They’re what?” He repeated, vitriol spilling hot from his mouth. “Just fucking tell me because everyone seems to know about them but me,”

Dream looked surprised at the outburst but it quickly faded, “Something going on at home?” He asked, having the audacity to sound concerned- to sound protective-

He remembered the underlying tone of Techno’s anger, the look in Wilbur's eyes,

It had been the same; protective.

Oh.

“I fucked up,” He said, feeling just like the kid he was only two and a half months ago. Groveling because he’d pushed Ranboo and Tubbo away in stupid fear.

Dream raised a brow.

“No one will tell me what’s up, all I hear are rumors. I just- I got so fucking mad,” He clenched his fists, glaring down at the shoes like they were at fault. “They won’t tell me shit- But it’s not like I tell them anything.”

Dream’s look flashed from understanding to awkward, and he reached back to fiddle with a thumb.

“Shit kid, I don’t think I’m the one who you’re supposed to be having this conversation with.” He admitted, a light flutter of humor in the words.

Tommy turned to Dream, determined. “What do you know?” He asked firmly, no room for evading the question in his tone.

“I’m surprised you don’t know already,” He said, Tommy practically latching onto every word from his mouth.

“Well I don’t,” He snapped hoping Dream would get the memo and just spill. “So fill me the hell in,”

Dream wheezed, hands up placatingly. “Okay, okay,” He settled down, contemplating for a moment before beginning. “Both brothers just have a reputation; Wil since they moved here, and Techno the second he was fostered.”

“Why?” Tommy pressed.

“Techno was-” Something in Dream’s voice shifted again. “He was violent, got into fights and shit. First couple of months and he barely spoke, then he was part of our group and that didn’t help. Did a lot of- shit. Things he didn’t bother hiding from the school; guess he was just chasing the high of it,”

He didn’t elaborate, and Tommy almost went to ask for details before Dream continued.

“Wil was- Wil was different. I feel like, you should talk to them about it. It’s not my place to say.”

“They won’t talk to me about it, that’s why I’m asking you,” Tommy said, rolling his eyes.

He knew he should just let it be, wait for them to open up themselves. But he couldn’t stomp the curiosity, the need to know if they were okay.

There was a moment where neither of them spoke, instead staring at each other until someone caved.

“Fine,” Dream said, breaking the contact finally. He took a steadying breath, and Tommy wondered why he was so tight-lipped about-

“Wil’s an addict.” He said, and everything came to a screeching halt.

He couldn’t hear anything after that, couldn’t see anything, submerged in his own shock. Things clicked together, slowly but surely; though none of it felt real. Wil wasn’t- Was he?

And then there was a flood of guilt, so quick and heavy his lungs were crushed under it. He thrashed in it, swept up and crashing with no hint of breath left.

“Stop,” He choked out, interrupting whatever Dream had been saying.

His hands shook-

Wil’s hands always shook. Was it because-

He buried the thought, dragging it down into the depth of guilt with him, hoping to drown it until he never saw it float up to his consciousness again.

“I don’t- I shouldn’t-” His lungs clamped, and his eyes squeezed shut at the pure cold that surrounded him.

He was used to the heat of fire, always haunted by the prickling heat of it, but for once he felt none of it.

Just the creeping frost. A concoction of emotions he'd never felt before.

Guilt, remorse, worry, fear, protectiveness-

There was a hand on his shoulder, Dream's eyes peering through the guilt drowning him and pulling him to the surface. He grabbed onto the hand, the only thing keeping him afloat.

"I shouldn't have asked," He said almost darkly amused by it, throat dry and eyes wide as he looked at Dream.

He remembered Wil's nerves in the car, how he'd sent him away when he needed to talk to Techno, the timid way he spoke about his addict bio parents. He remembered the look on Wil's face when he'd smelled the alcohol on him, the worry so twisted on his face as the scent of weed permeated from Tommy's clothes. He remembered the dust on the cigarettes, hidden under the nightstand like a relic of a habit far past. The easy almost muscle memory way he'd taken care of him, the breathalyzer Wil brought out that no fucking house would normally have, the way the grip of his hand felt like protection and fear all at once.

The church meetings, the worry on Phil's face, Techno's palpable fear, the mood swings, the tension, the house crumbling like cards-

The frame shifted, his perspective moving just a minuscule amount; yet revealing so many facets he'd never even seen.

Wilbur had looked at him that day at the stream.

He'd looked at him with the truth just on his tongue, and he'd held it in. Swallowed it back so deep it'd never see the light of day.

Because when he felt the word addict on his tongue,

When he saw how the world viewed him, heard the way people talked about him.

He only saw a fuck up.

And he thought Tommy would see the same.

There was a flash of emotions as he had the realization, so potent he'd dug into Dream's hand like he'd lose himself forever without the anchor.

He'd been so stupid, so selfish- so *blind*.

When all Wilbur had wanted was someone to look at him and not spew the shit the rest of the world did. He chose to have someone who didn't know when it seemed like everyone around him knew.

And Tommy had been mad at that. He'd been so childish, taking it personally and throwing his own damn pity party over it.

Wilbur hadn't wanted to tell him, and maybe he never did. Maybe he wanted to have four months with someone who didn't have to know all his business. Whatever he'd wanted, well it didn't matter.

Because Tommy had taken the choice from Wil.

He let go of Dream's hand, feeling the chilly numb of emptiness. With a blink everything was gone, his emotions, his thoughts, everything.

"Tommy?" Dream asked, breaking the silence.

"Fuck," He murmured.

He shrugged Dream's hand off, reaching under the box to grab his buzzing phone. His head had gone from everything to nothing, and he was barely holding on to the moment.

Tubbo

Hey Ranboo, how do you feel abt a party?

There's one this weekend

Ranboo

Ur joking lol

Wait r u serious?

How would we even get in

Tubbo

@ Tommy

He could get us in

He looked up at Dream, who couldn't hide the worry morphing his face. Tommy's heart would still at the look any other time, but he still just felt nothing.

"You hosting the party this weekend?" He asked, not even feeling like he was in his own body anymore.

Hesitantly, Dream nodded.

Tommy wasted no time, words spilling from his mouth without a second thought. “I want in, with my friends.”

The frown was immediate. “Tommy I don’t think that’s a good id-”

A distinct feeling of guilt took over him; the kind that only beckoned bad decisions demanded impulsivity and foolishness to feed it. He was familiar with it, sickeningly so, but he hadn’t felt a lick of it since he’d been with the Craft’s. He’d grown used to its absence, and now with its sudden presence, it was worse than ever.

It smelled like gasoline and mistakes, and it consumed and consumed until none of him was left.

“Get us in.” He said, mind already made up.

Chapter End Notes

I hate this chapter so much and I don’t know why. But excited because this marks the beginning of Act 2 of the story

Anyway, I'm so excited for everything to come. Strap in. Also thank you for the comments! Please leave some on this, I love talking to ya'll and seeing what you think.

Let me know, who's your favorite character in the story, and whats been your fav scene?

Heat

Chapter Notes

I just can't do this anymore. Clinging onto this fic because I think it's the only good thing I've ever done. This shit is the only positive thing I think my existence has ever created.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy had the entire day to pace crop circles in the carpet while he waited for Phil to take him to Ranboo's. He couldn't stop thinking about what Dream had told him the previous night or the guilt he could still feel creeping up on him. He knew the right thing to do would be telling Wil, but he didn't know how to start that conversation. He'd fucked up and he didn't even remotely know how he could begin to fix it.

And it'd been hard, with Wilbur and Techno giving him the space he asked for, but looking at him with fucking kicked puppy eyes whenever they had the chance. The whole house seemed awkward, the soft footsteps and homey atmosphere replaced by something stilted and cautious. Techno and Wilbur because of what happened yesterday, and Philza and Wilbur who were avoiding being in the same room. It even seemed like Phil picked up something was up with Tommy, because he was being cautious with him as well.

They were arguably all just a bunch of sad puppies running out from Tommy's feet every step he took. Especially Wilbur and Techno.

Fine, maybe Tommy was exaggerating that part, but the brothers kept glancing at him and looking all sad and shit. It's like they took his request for space a bit *too* far. He wasn't going to combust if they were in the same room as him, but apparently they thought he was some kind of bomb threat.

Like when Tommy went to brush his teeth that morning, and Wilbur had walked in, sweater all rumpled and crust still stuck to the corner of his eyes. He'd taken one dazed look at Tommy who had been caught redhanded with toothpaste all over his shirt, and snapped awake. Tommy hadn't even gotten a word in before Wilbur was spewing apologies for walking in. He was backtracking like Tommy was holding a gun to his head, which led to him promptly slamming into the doorway in his rush to get out and get away.

Tommy had to watch with wide eyes as one second Wil was rushing out of the bathroom, and the next he was cursing, falling in a heap on the hallway floor. He barely had the idea to set his toothbrush down and go help Wil, weird secret be damned, when Phil came rushing up the stairs full mother hen, probably hearing the thud and Wil's pained shout.

Which then prompted an awkward stare down between them, because they *still* hadn't talked about the fight. Phil's hands hovered hesitantly over his son, questions pausing as Wilbur stared sadly up at him through a bloody nose and wild hair.

And Tommy watched it all from the bathroom door, toothbrush hanging from his lips as he wondered if it was too late to close the door or go back to bed.

And then it got worse,

Techno opened his door, calling for Wilbur because apparently everyone in this house was listening for emergencies. Tommy could pinpoint the exact moment he looked down at Wil and saw blood. Because he froze up like he'd just turned to stone, seeming to flicker between incredible amounts of stress, and extreme protective brother mode.

Nobody moved for a second, the tension in the house growing and growing as the silence set in. Phil's hands were shaking with restraint, like he wasn't sure if he could touch his son. Techno was white knuckling the doorway, like he wanted to rush over and help but the sight of blood or maybe the tension was holding him back. And Tommy, who was watching all of this with bated breath, had toothpaste dripping down his chin.

He'd hesitantly reached up to wipe his chin when Wilbur burst into tears, a sob muffled by blood and fabric breaking the quiet as he reached for his dad. Phil stumbled back with the added weight, but there was no hesitation to wrap his arms around his son. Muffled crying was broken by apologies that couldn't even be made out, and it seemed to kick them all back into gear.

Tommy had to clean toothpaste off the floor and his shirt with his heart twisting as the family awkwardly fumbled through communicating; skirting around the small detail that Wil was an addict thinking Tommy was still unaware of it all. He should be there with them, in the hallway comforting Wil, but he couldn't. And it wasn't because of them, it was because of *him* .

He couldn't sit there and hold Wil's hand and grab his headphones, because he knew that they weren't just dealing with a bloody nose. He couldn't pretend like he didn't know; Be someone disengaged in a moment where the family was so vulnerable.

So with a heavy heart, he decided to just leave them be.

As he stepped around Phil who was now sitting on the floor, cradling Wil, and Techno who was stopping the blood with his own sleeve looking absolutely sick, they all looked up at him with varying degrees of guilt and sadness. He could see the apology on Techno and Wilbur's faces, the explanation on the tip of Phil's tongue.

It felt like being absolutely clocked in the metaphorical balls, and Tommy interrupted all their talking via stuttering out that he was going to have breakfast and sprinting down the stairs.

Though it wasn't before he gave Wil the most painfully awkward pat on the head; which was more for himself because his heart burned by just not being on the floor with them.

He knew his hand lingered a bit too long on the brown curls, because it had Wil's eyes watering again. He pulled his hand back like he'd burned it, confession cloying like smoke in his lungs, and then promptly left.

Yeah, things were off to say the least.

He'd decided to just eat his terribly overcooked eggs, hunched over the table and texting in the group chat about the party and ignoring the whispers of the conversation upstairs. It wasn't a shock when Techno rushed out the front door with his gym bag already packed, sending Tommy the closest thing his blank face could get at an apologetic look. But it was shocking that Wilbur trailed behind him, keys in his hand and guitar case on his back; but he was more obvious about the looks he was shooting Tommy.

Phil barely got out a "Boys what about breakfast?" Before they were out the door.

Tommy would later learn why they'd rushed out so fast when he trudged up the stairs, entering his room to a "we're sorry" scribbled in glittery pen and stuck to his fresh filled water bottle and a special chocolate bar he knew Wil liked to hid in his room.

If he'd been punched in the emotional balls before, now they were completely castrated and he was once again getting absolutely destroyed by guilt.

Tommy

You sure abt the party?

Tubbo

offc, itll b dope!

Ranboo

As long as you guys don't start another fight ig...

Im not rlly a party person

Tubbo

just stikc w us!

u dont have ti talk to stranghers

Itll b good to do at leasr once

Ranboo

You're right :)

My therapist said I need to get out more anyway

Plus I can't wait to have a sleepover with you guys :D

Tommy

Idk.

Tubbo

come on tommy it;l be fien

u alraedy got a ride right?

Ranboo

We can just avoid the gardening club?

And we'll leave if you're uncomfortable!

Tommy groaned, throwing his phone across the bed and slamming his head in the pillow. It was too late to back out now, not when his friends seemed genuinely excited to go to a party. Part of him just wanted to stay home and have a movie night with the Craft's, but even if he stayed home that wouldn't be possible.

He had to figure out a way to talk with Wilbur, because at this rate he could barely look at him without crushing guilt. Maybe the party would get his mind off of it. He could hang out with his friends, stress over avoiding George, and deal with the terrifying smell of alcohol and smoke.

How... fun.

No, he was going to get through this. He'd be positive about it, and trust his friends. This wouldn't be like last time, because Ranboo and Tubbo wouldn't leave him. He could leave at anytime, and he didn't have to rely on Dream for anything.

He just had to convince Philza to let him go, and not throw up as he waited for it.

—

Watching Phil chat with Ranboo's mom was a lot more stressful then he thought it would be. He'd originally curled up on the other end of the couch, head in him arms as he stared at Phil on the other side. Philza had been pleased when he said he was going to hang out with friends, and even more so that he agreed that he could talk to Ranboo's mom to make sure it was legit.

It's just that Ranboo's mom didn't know they would be sneaking out.

He was stiff watching them talk over the phone, even though Phil was smiling and laughing as he talked. At first he'd actually took the time to ask about the hang out, when Tommy would get home, who would drive who, etc. Then it turned into them talking about lasagna

recipes somehow, and even though he was stressed Tommy did warm a bit at how much of a Dad Phil seemed.

It was also a rare time these days that Phil seemed to relax, melting into the couch as he talked with his hands about the ease of his favorite tomato sauce recipe. When he finally hung up, he looked over at Tommy, raising a brow at how he oddly he sat at the end of the couch.

“You can go mate, I’ll take you,” He said softly, a small reassuring smile on his face. “Thank you for letting me call,”

Tommy nodded, hesitantly, but he made no move to get up off the couch. He felt conflicted, like the second he got up he’d have to go face what he was procrastinating. Here on the couch with Phil he could pretend it was a normal day, one where he could sit and be safe from everything going on. There’d be no gardening club, no fight with his foster brothers, no time with the Craft’s slipping from his fingers.

He could just be a kid,

A kid sitting with his foster Dad...

His heart clenched, and he pushed those thoughts down.

“Tommy?” Phil asked, looking at him with something similar to concern. “You don’t look to happy, is something wrong?”

Tommy shrugged. The smart thing would be to go upstairs and pretend like nothing was wrong. But he felt like a kid under Phil’s gaze, and not quite in a bad way. It made him want to spill everything, collapse under the weight of the world and have someone catch him; to have someone be responsible instead of him for once.

“Nothing’s wrong,” He mumbled lacking his usual energy.

Phil picked up on it immediately, his blond brows furrowing as he stared Tommy down. “Is this one of those situations where I should’ve said no?” He asked, sounding a little more gentle. “I can call back and tell Ms. Ender I need you to stay home,”

Tommy snorted, shaking his head and displacing his curls. “Fuck no,” He said, but it lacked any bite.

“You sure? I can play the bad cop.”

He scoffed at Phil, nose scrunched petuantly at the doting. “I’m a big man, I don’t need no help.”

Philza held up his hands placatingly, seeming to back off. “Well alright mate, but if you change your mind,”

Tommy gave him a sarcastic thumbs up, but Phil deemed it good enough. Before he could reach for it, Tommy was leaning forward to get the remote on the coffee table; handing it to

Phil. He gave a quick thanks, face soft and open and much too kind for Tommy to handle.

He was nice enough to let Tommy sit with him on the couch in peace, watching Phil watch whatever reality show he had on the tv. He looked tired, permanent bags under his eyes from his long shifts, nails bitten to the quick. But he never stopped looking kind. He had smile lines, an open expression, and relaxed posture; everything Tommy was starting to associate with a perfect dad.

No other foster would've let this happen. He'd never felt comforted by a foster parents presence, only ever afraid or annoyed. It was that unfamiliar comfort that spurred him on, Phil looked so warm and relaxed, melted into the couch; so he shifted closer. He kept shooting glances over, waiting for Phil to notice or react, but he never did.

He waited until the juicy parts of the show before moving closer; Phil enraptured by the leads arguing about something insignificant. Every inch closer warmed him, and he thought he'd stop, but something just wasn't right. He didn't do initiating contact, it wasn't his thing, so surely sitting close would be enough.

He had a great idea, or maybe a terrible one.

Today was going to suck anyway though, so there wasn't much else to lose. Nothing would be scarier than having to step into a room with George again, so he took the plunge. His hands were practically staving his jeans as he readied himself for the big move, and with a steadying breath, and his heart pounding in his ears,

He laid down, so slowly it was almost comedic. He stuck to his side, and kept his eyes on the door in case he had to bolt. But finally, he took up the rest of the couch, the top of his head pressed against Phil's thigh.

His eyes squeezed shut, waiting for Phil to shift away, or get mad, but he didn't.

He went from being as stiff as a board to melting into the couch, thudding heart giving way to saccharine warmth as he grew used to the contact. Maybe it was during the Febreze commercial, or the Lysol one, Tommy didn't know, but at some point he'd pressed his head further into Phil thigh, legs stretching out as he shifted to maximize his comfort.

The touch seemed to soothe the bite of the winds of time, defending against the worry bubbling in his stomach.

He shifted again, chasing that feeling.

Phil chuckled shifting as well, and Tommy almost mourned his leg moving away a bit, until a hand rested in his hair.

"Can't get comfortable?" He asked, and Tommy could hear the smile in his voice, but all he really thought about was the soothing weight of a hand in his hair.

"No," He said, trying not to look so obviously enraptured by the affection. "This couch fuckin' sucks, it's literally dogwater."

Phil poked his nose, watching as Tommy scrunched it in mock rage.

“It’s an expensive piece of furniture mate,”

“Expensive piece of trash,” Tommy shot back, reveling in Phil’s responding laugh. “It hurts my neck,” He said finally.

“Here hold on,”

Phil moved and Tommy almost whined in protest, but then he was shifting back into place a throw pillow hand. He placed it on his lap, patting the cushion like he would for a dog. Tommy wanted to refuse, but instead he just groaned, lifting his head and shifting to lay it on Phil’s lap.

“Can’t believe you’re making a poor, broken, child move,” He complained, head sinking into the pillow and immediately feeling leagues more comfortable. “This is abuse,”

Phil snorted, hand going back to rest in Tommy’s hair as he turned his attention back to the screen. “Better isn’t it?”

Tommy quietly grumbled, melting into the touch of Phil messing with his curls. “Yeah, thanks” He murmured finally, eyes shutting so he could etch the moment into his memory. “Still a shitty couch,”

He wished it could’ve lasted forever.

—

That night, before he left Phil had given him the house key. It was the first house key he could ever remember having. It was carved onto one of those fancy keys, a little cow head as the grip, and black spots.

The red converse fit surprisingly well, and Tommy didn’t know how he felt about that. He put them on, shoving his usual shoes in his backpack, before him and his friends snuck out of Ranboo’s window and into Dream’s car. Which was an experience and a half considering it was the most awkward ride ever. He loved his friends, but by the third time Tubbo kicked Dream’s chair and Ranboo got his sleeve stuck in the window, he never wanted them to interact again.

Dream turned on the child locks and Tommy could only bury his head in his hands, praying they would get to Dream’s house faster. Nothing had prepared him for the absolute *glare* the usual timid Ranboo sent Dream as they got out of the car.

So, *that’s* why they had made the car ride hell.

He grabbed the lanky fucker by the wrist, pulling him back towards him before Dream turned and saw them.

“What are you doing?” He hissed, pointedly not looking at the way Dream was attempting to extract Tubbo from the back of his car where he’d somehow gotten stuck in the seatbelt.

“I’m asserting dominance,” Ranboo whispered back, still glaring at the back of Dream’s head.

“What the fuck, are you going to fucking piss on him too?”

Ranboo at least had the gaul to look offended by that, but then he was thoughtful. “Tubbo might,”

There was an unholy screech from the car as Tubbo presumably got more tangled in the seatbelt. Dream wiped his brow, and even though Tommy couldn’t see his face exactly, he knew he would look pained.

“What is wrong with you lot?”

Ranboo frowned, before he was pointing down at the bright red converse Tommy was wearing. “You’ve been indoctrinated in their *cult* !”

“It’s not a cult!” Tommy shot back over the slew of curses coming from both Tubbo and Dream.

Ranboo raised an exaggerated brow, hand on his hip in the mirror image of the stance his mom had made earlier when she told them not to break her table; which had unfortunately suffered the wrath of a game of monopoly. It had been a miracle that Dream had even arrived to anyone still living, especially after Tubbo had somehow swallowed the hat piece and caused absolute panic as Tommy tried and failed to preform the himlich maneuver.

His mom had been nice though, a total milf -not that he’d ever tell Ranboo that-

Though she also didn’t look at Tommy with an unblinking stare like Ranboo was.

“Okay fine-” He caved, ignoring the annoying smile of triumph on his friend’s face. “They’re a weird fucking group.”

“Thank you!” He leaned closer to Tommy, voice lowering more to make sure Dream couldn’t hear. “I don’t trust any of them, especially since you told us- you *know* .”

Tommy frowned, the conversation feeling a bit too serious for what his poor heart could handle. He’d told them he wanted them to avoid the the gardening club members prior to sneaking out, saying that they were bad news. But he wasn’t about to explain the complexity of the shit he got into over the thrum of music coming from the McMansion and Tubbo’s plight.

“Just drop it, Dream’s cool,” They both looked over, definitely not missing the way the senior leaned with his head against the frame of the car, something that suspiciously looked like tears in the corner of his eyes as Tubbo thrashed in the back.

“Totally man,” Ranboo said flatly,

“I don’t want to hear it from you Toilet Legs,”

“That was one time!” Rambo shouted.

Actually entering the party was a bit of a blur, one minute he was pulling Tubbo from Dream’s car, and the next he was trailing behind his friends as they stepped into the house. The music was a lot clearer when it wasn’t muffled by the walls, and Tommy felt like he’d underestimated just how many people would be there.

He subconsciously moved closer to his friends, the familiar lay out of the house had memories from the night he’d been fucked up echoing in his head. He hardly recognized anyone, not that he’d have a great chance of doing that anyway. The lights were off and there were fucking *lasers*, an assortment of flashing colors and what looked like star projectors were on. The underlying red glow helped stop him from tripping over his own feet, but as they made their way through the dancing crowd he slammed into someone.

He mumbled an apology, looking at the dude who was now looking up at him. He had to shout to be heard over the bass of the song, the liquid in his red solo cup sloshing because he spoke with his hands.

“M sorry man!” He said looking genuinely apologetic, and then he was squinting at Tommy. Oblivious to the tugging of his friends on his sleeves. “Oh m’ god!” He exclaimed suddenly, just before Tommy was turning to catch up with his group. “Bro, ‘re you even old enough to b’ here?”

Tommy scowled, turning on his heel and gently pushing through people to catch up to Ranboo and Tubbo. He was just on time to see them shuffle into the hallway, and he quickened his pace to fall into place behind them.

“Thought we lost you there,” Ranboo said in his ear, tugging on Tommy’s sleeve to pull him out of the way of someone.

Their shoulders knocked, and Tommy used a bit more force to stumble his lanky friend. “I totally brained someone on the dance floor, you missed it Boo,”

“Sure Tommy,” Ranboo said. “Because your scrawny-”

“Tommy!” Dream interrupted, squeezing behind a dazed looking Tubbo to come up and face Tommy.

The music was slightly less loud in the hallway, but Tommy still had to watch Dream’s lips to make sure he was hearing the right words.

“You guys have to meet me back here by four am okay?” He said seriously, like he had when they’d first gotten into the car and discussed the plans.

“Okay dude,” Tommy said, watching as Dream’s brows furrowed.

“What?” He shouted loudly, and Tubbo jumped in response, standing far too close to Dream.

“Fuckin’ music,” Tommy hissed, barely hearing himself as he spoke. “I said OKAY,”

Dream’s face settled and he gave Tommy a smile at the confirmation. He had the familiar look of someone done with a conversation, so before he could leave Tommy was grasping his arm, stepping away from Ranboo’s side and leaning into Dream’s space.

“Is the stupid fuck here?” He asked, watching as the freckles on Dream’s face morphed with his frown.

“George?” Dream asked after a pause.

Tommy scoffed, “No shit, who the fuck else?”

Dream shrugged, bumped slightly as Tubbo brushed past him to launch himself in Ranboo’s space. “He’s here but he’ll mostly be in the back,”

Tommy’s brows furrowed, glaring at his friend’s lips to make out the sentence. The song had switched and he could feel the entire wall vibrate with it. Regardless he relaxed a bit at the words, before he remembered the decision he’d made to himself in the car ride to the party.

“Take me to him,” He demanded, anticipating the look on Dream’s face.

“Tommy-”

“You owe me,” Tommy reminded.

Dream shut up quickly then, rolling his eyes at him. “Fine, come on,”

There was a chin hooked on his shoulder then, and Tommy flinched before he recognized Ranboo’s fluffy hair.

“Where are you going?” He asked, voice directly in Tommy’s ear.

He felt a tugging at his other side before Tubbo was there, on his tip toes to dig his bony chin into his shoulder like Ranboo. “Yeah where the fuck are you going?” He asked, far louder than Ranboo had been.

“Fuck Tubbo, you’re right in my ear,” Tommy flinched, trying to move back but his friends remained put.

“You’re going alone?” Ranboo asked, something suspicious in his tone.

“That’s a shit idea,” Tubbo added, voice still uncomfortably loud. “I thought we were here to parttyyy,”

Tommy batted at him, well aware of the impatient look Dream was giving him.

“I’ll be back, just don’t fuck off into the sun while I’m gone,”

He couldn't help the thought that they'd leave him just like Dream did last time.

Tubbo unlatched himself from him, but Ranboo hesitated voice lowering as he said one last thing, "My phone is on, just call if you need anything."

"Okay Momboo," Tommy mocked, despite the fact he was grateful for the backup.

When they finally detached from him, he nodded to Dream. Falling into step besides him as they went down the hall.

Loud thumping walls turned into muffled sound, the crowd mellowed out to stragglers, and bright leds faded to dim red lighting. By the time they went upstairs to the back of the house, there was hardly anyone lurking. Tommy looked out at the extravagant windows, ignoring the weird familiarity that tugged just at the back of his mind. Dream was quick, and soon enough they were at a point where Tommy could lead them if he had to.

At a particular door, someone was on the ground, leaning up against the door with only a phone reflecting their face. The reflecting gold necklace and light blonde hair peaking out from a hood tugged at Tommy's mind, even though he couldn't quite place who the person was. He was quick to spot the white converse before the guy was looking up and watching them approach.

"Punz," Dream said in greeting, stopping in front of the door and peering down at him.

"Hey, Dream," Blue eyes pierced into Tommy's, and a hint of recognition lit up in them. "Tommy," He said in greeting, giving a small nod.

Tommy didn't give one back, not entirely comfortable the guy knew his name when he just learned his.

"Mind letting us through?" Dream asked, and it was then as Punz shifted in thought that Tommy noticed the weighty gold chains wrapped around his wrist.

Great, another rich kid like Dream.

"Depends, I'm kind of comfortable," He responded, looking back down at whatever was on his phone.

"Have I met him?" Tommy asked Dream, uncaring that it was loud enough for Punz to hear as well.

"Them," Dream correct, "You've met them,"

"Huh," Tommy replied, looking down at Punz who seemed completely uninterested in them. "They look familiar," He added, wondering just what they were looking at on their phone that had them fully sucked into it.

It was then Punz spoke again, not bothering to look up from their phone. "I gave you water after you threw up in a potted plant,"

Tommy paled, he didn't remember doing that at all. "Shit,"

"That's what happened to my bonsai tree?" Dream said suddenly, something like horror coming across his face.

That had Punz cracking a smile, and then they were setting their phone down to look up at Dream. "It was an ugly tree, he did you a favor,"

"But I spen-"

"Can we not talk about this right now?" Tommy interrupted, arms crossing as he glared at Dream. "Tubbo and Ranboo could be *dying* right now without me, I would rather hurry this up,"

Punz gave a long suffering sigh, one far too tired for anyone under forty. They reached up to twist the knob, scooching over just barely enough so someone could slip through.

The scent of weed hit Tommy like a truck, and he didn't have to peer through the haze and dim blue light to know that the familiar couch he and Sapnap had smoked on was in there. He wasted no time, squeezing past Punz and entering the room with the potent scent, hoping it wouldn't leech into his clothes.

Dream cursed behind him,

"Are you kidding me dude?" He asked, and Tommy looked back to see him being held back from the door with Punz's arm,

"You didn't pay," They said dryly, and Tommy couldn't tell if it was a joke or not.

Dream shifted, looking exasperated but not surprised. "I don't have to pay, it's my fucking house!"

"And it's *my* door to guard,"

Dream made eye contact with Tommy, green meeting blue through the dark haze of bad decisions and regret. Tommy didn't want him to be around, part of him was petty and thought he didn't deserve to be; not after the last time. He knew he could handle this on his own though, he had to.

"I'll meet you when we leave," Tommy said.

Dream hesitated, eyes narrowing and jaw clenching as he studied Tommy. "Alright," He said finally, seeming to relax. "See you,"

Before Dream could get out anything else the door shut and Tommy was cut off from the conversation, and fully thrust into the atmosphere of the room. When he breathed in it wasn't just the scent of weed filling his lungs, it was accompanied with the mix of dread. The idea of going back to the house even one bit lighter before he had to face his most recent mistake, it was encouraging enough to keep inhaling.

Sapnap's red eyes were staring up at him through a wall of smoke, a slow easy smile spreading across his face as he pulled the blunt away. For some reason he looked more at home engulfed in smoke and ease.

Tommy couldn't relate, he thought the couch at home was nicer. Surrounded by the sound of MTV and the soft chatter of the Craft's; the memory of Phil's hand on his head. He wondered if Sapnap didn't have that, if this was his sense of comfort instead. Or maybe it was just a small aspect of him, something that didn't hold as much significance as Tommy assumed.

"Tommy, what's up dude?" He asked, far slower than he normally spoke. It was scary how natural it sounded, familiar in a way that nudged at buried memories of their first meeting.

He was slouched on the end of his couch, supplies laid out on the coffee table just like that night. Rolling papers fluttered in the soft blow of the AC, ashtray full of roaches that could've been from the same night. Though this time there was someone else with him, their feet set in his lap and a switch in their hands as they leaned their head over the armrest.

Tommy couldn't help but notice he wasn't wearing any converse. He seemed comfortable in the presence of Sapnap, their proximity held a level of comfort. When he spoke to Tommy, he was peering out from the switch. Grey eyes hooked on him and curly brown hair shielding them from the room. He didn't seem like he belonged in the room, not in the cloying atmosphere. His warm sweater and kind eyes reminded him too much of Wilbur.

Tommy had never seen him before, but it's not like he could really tell since the collar of the dude's huge sweater was pulled up to cover his nose.

"George is recruiting kids now?" He said in distaste, as he studied Tommy. The fabric in front of his mouth shifted as he made an expression Tommy couldn't see, turning to Sapnap.

"That's *so* screwed up dude,"

The room seemed to silence itself for a second, and Tommy didn't dare interrupt.

Sure enough there was a thump as the man Tommy was both relieved and horrified to see, hopped down from a chair in the corner. Tommy hadn't noticed his presence before, but perhaps he should have. George waltzed over to the back of the couch, leaning across the headrest to peer down at the two; the air of control and superiority he seemed to have over the room didn't seem to have changed.

"Shut up Karl," He said, no bite in his words. "I will kick you out," Then he looked up at Tommy, finally meeting his eyes. Tommy willed himself to not look away from the dark pools of nothingness boring into him. "I didn't recruit him."

Tommy bit into his cheek, already struggling with controlling the fire in his lungs.

"Noooo," Sapnap drawled, arm reaching up to smack George. "Don't be a fucking bitch, Karl's allowed in."

Karl's eyes crinkled as he stared at Sapnap, glittering with warmth and affection that rivaled the burning of the blunt as he laughed, "You sound stupid when you whine like that,

‘nooooooooo’” He mocked, slow and slurred like Sapnap.

Sapnap frowned, but Tommy could see it wasn’t genuine. He looked a bit more awake with the mirth dancing in his eyes. He was responding, something light and teasing in his tone, and they quickly lost themselves in an argument. Tommy didn’t care though, he was focused on George who was focused on him right back.

“Nice shoes,” He said, and Tommy forced himself to remain calm against the blaze raging through him.

“We need to talk.” He said, in place of the various insults he wanted to say instead.

George didn’t seem surprised, and instead he just gestured for Tommy to come over. The movement was slow and calculated, and it bothered Tommy. George wasn’t full of himself in the way that he was compensating for something, no, he seemed confident. Assured in himself and everything he did, like he had made himself untouchable. People like that scared Tommy, more so than ones who lashed out and hurt, who let emotions guide them.

Behind the couch the room opened up a bit, and there was a tall table with stools that had been where George had been sitting; there was a half empty drink but no sign of it hindering George’s coordination.

He followed George’s example, sitting on one of the stools and resting his arms on the table between them. The stool was gorgeous, all modern sharp and dark edges, alluring but uncomfortable. Fitting for George he thought.

“So, the shoes don’t fit? You don’t like the color?” George asked with a smile, but Tommy was smart enough to hear the teasing lilt in the words.

It was like this was a joke to him, a game. But to Tommy it was everything, his stability, his stance with the rare care he’d been lucky enough to find here.

“Fuck off,” He snapped, scowling at the stupid face. It was hard to control himself here, even sober. But even with his inhibitions intact, the words that’d been trapped in his head finally coming out. For just a second he let the smoke coating his lungs escape and taint the air. “I’m here to tell you I’m not part of your *stupid* fucking group, and you can take the shoes and shove them up your *ass*,” His fist slammed down on the table for emphasis, jostling the ice in George’s glass but not much else.

His glare was sharp, but his words were sharper. He wasn’t anyone’s bitch, and he wasn’t going to let anyone ruin what he had. The Craft’s? They weren’t perfect, not by a long shot. But they were perfect to him. Glitter pen swirling and mending mistakes, hands holding his own through the night so he wouldn’t sink, warmth and heart cultivated on a couch when the rest of the world was dark and frozen.

He would do anything to keep his hold on that warmth, he would fight for it like nothing he’d ever known. And George, George was threatening that.

And he knew this, especially as he looked right into Tommy's rage with his empty frozen eyes.

And yet, he looked completely apathetic, reaching out to grab the glass and take a sip. It was like kindling to Tommy's flame; how could someone be so cruel, so unfeeling.

"Okay," George said around the lip of the glass, he spoke when he set it down again. "I don't give a fuck what you *think*,"

Tommy felt his anger flare, the resentment he'd been building since the message boiling inside him like spewing magma.

The world hadn't cared, the world never seemed to care. Not when he was abandoned by his parents, and not when he'd dragged himself through hell. And it was unbearable, *infuriating*.

He hated this. He hated where he was.

He had everything, friends, a great foster home, a spot here. Somewhere he belonged.

And despite it, the world didn't care.

It should, it should fucking care.

And it was going to have to this time.

Because Tommy was not losing this. He was not going to let himself fall into the same old habits, the same familiar mistakes. He owed it to them.

He didn't hold himself back as the magma bubbled over, adrenaline and rage cutting through him as his shoe connected with George's shin with only a fraction of energy he felt.

"Ow," George hissed, jerking back in his chair and glaring at Tommy and it was the first bit of satisfying something in the nothingness of his gaze. "What the fuck?"

Tommy glared back, satisfaction captivating him like a drug because the veil of apathy was no longer reflected in the dark eyes staring back. "It's not what I *think*," He said, voice firm. "I'm going to leave in two months, and I don't want to see your ugly ass face ever again," He reeled his foot back again, but before he could kick George's hand was grasping his wrist with freezing fingers.

His face was dark as he twisted his fingers into the wrist, just soft enough not to bruise. "Do *not* kick me again,"

Tommy felt a chill cut through the rage.

He released his grip, leaning back in his chair with that air of indifference, dark look long gone. "I don't care what you do when you're gone, as long as you don't fucking snitch," His glass clinked as he set it down, "I'm just protecting my club," He said, like threatening Tommy's quality of life was simple.

He fumed in his chair, and bit his cheek. “Don’t start that shit with me.” He snapped, restraining the urge to speak any louder than he had to. “I can’t fucking do anything without your ‘club’ messing up my shit,”

George rolled his eyes, like he was already exhausted by the conversation. It made Tommy want to punch the lights out of him. If he could punch George without the whole fucking group being on his case, then he would’ve beat him into the ground already.

“If you want to have this talk with anyone, go bother Dream. He’s the one who got you fucking involved.” He sighed, exasperated like Tommy was but a minor inconvenience. “I’m just cleaning up his *mess*,”

Mess? Tommy’s fists clenched.

“He didn’t mean to get me involved like this!” He snapped, voice raising with his rising anger. “You’re the one doing all this shit!”

“Please,” George spat, arms crossed as he stared up at Tommy. “Like I want anything to do with his sick fantasy,”

“What fantasy?” Tommy mocked, “Having a friend who’s not a wrongun like you lot?”

Genuine amusement flashed in George’s eyes, and it was the first time Tommy had seen it on him. The laughter that had been haunting him since the last time he’d seen the man, spilled from his mouth, wrapping around Tommy’s throat like a snake.

“Are you serious?” He asked, like Tommy was stupid. And for a brief flash Tommy felt the urge to cower. “He’s only friends with you because Techno hates him,”

And that took Tommy off guard. His foster brother’s name sounded rancid coming from George’s mouth. It had disgust thrashing in him and filling his every sense. None of these people deserved to talk about Techno, not after he’d left whatever life he had here.

Techno was good, he was kind and devoted to his family and himself. These people were nothing close to him, and Tommy refused to let his past with them change his views.

“You don’t even know what you’re talking about,” He protested, leaning away when he felt the familiar buzzing urge to fight under his skin. He wished he’d never come, never give George the chance to spin more bullshit.

George just grinned, amusement and cunning sick on his face as he leaned forward. He looked like a predator that knew he had his prey trapped, and Tommy hated it.

He should just fucking leave, this was never going to get him anywhere. He couldn’t handle this, he couldn’t fix it. He needed *help*. Help from someone who would know what to do.

He shifted ready to stand up, the weight of his phone heavy in his pocket.

He could just- Philza said he could call. Whenever and wherever. He could call him and sink into a sweet tasting lecture and warmth. He could call Techno, come clean and get advice

from someone who would understand. Or he could call Wil, apologize and hope that maybe he'd sit with him through the night again.

But he'd never get to do that, losing the window of opportunity within the blink of an eye.

Because before he could hop off the chair, cold bony hands were grabbing onto his arm again. Digging into flesh with a vice grip.

"You're just a replacement," George said, sick amusement laced in every word, "A weaker-" The grip on his arm tightened keeping Tommy from pulling himself free, "Lamer replacement,"

Try as he might to pull away and ignore the words, they'd hit their target. Sinking into his head and pulling on curiosity he'd buried.

A replacement?

Tommy tried to hide the emotions from surfacing on his face, but he couldn't and George seemed to eat it up. Mouth twisting into a smile at the hurt and anger erupting from Tommy in embarrassing clarity.

"Fuck off," He spat, desperate to mask the weakness peering through. His voice was shaking, and his face was heating in something like shame. "He doesn't even know Techno,"

He said it, but the words felt uncertain in his mouth.

"Come on Tommy," George taunted, "You're not that stupid are you?"

Tommy frowned, head screaming at him to leave before he heard anything he couldn't come back from. This wasn't going to be like the situation with Wilbur again, he wasn't going to dig into things Techno didn't willingly share. Finally he yanked himself out of George's tight grip. "He *said* he didn't know-"

"Dream breathes bullshit," George interrupted, something like glee in his tone, "The *only* reason you're here," He said, looking right into Tommy's eyes with satisfaction like he could barely contain the words. "Is so he can get back at Techno for some petty bullshit, he was going to get you involved the second he heard there was going to be a new Craft."

Tommy's heart sunk, and he wished against all odds he wasn't trapped like a fool under George's gaze.

"He's not your fucking friend, he didn't care who the *hell* you were going to be. Only that you were a Craft, and he could get the last metaphorical punch in because that freak stopped talking to him-" Tommy's heart was hammering, body screaming at the overwhelming mix of emotions showering him. He wanted George to shit up, for the words to go back to just thoughts, but they didn't.

"You're just some fucked up fight between the two of them. Since god knows no one could take Techno in a fucking fight, not even Dream. You're just replacement of Dream's best frie-"

He wouldn't hear the rest, he couldn't. He was launching from the stool, something hot in his throat as he stumbled past things to make his way to the door. When he swung it open, it knocked into Punz. He didn't even bother apologizing to them, too busy rushing down the hall and trying to breathe through the jumping in his lungs.

Dream had lied.

He'd lied.

Right to his face.

He knew Techno well. He'd gotten Tommy into this shit on purpose. He didn't give a shit, he didn't care. He was the reason Tommy was in this mess.

He'd been tricking him, using him and uncaring of who he was. He'd let Tommy confide in him, confided in his own things. And now he knew Tommy's secret, seen part of his life that Tommy could never take back, and he'd just been using him.

He'd treated him like his friend, but Tommy couldn't even tell if it was genuine. Where did the lies end and the truth begin?

Had he ever had a choice in the first place? Was he doomed to end up here spiraling out of control, from the second Dream had seen him in class and known he was with the Craft's?

Had he been destined to fail here? No matter what?

He stumbled down the stairs, squeezing between the growing crowd and trying desperately to outrun his thoughts. It was too much, all too much. His heart was pounding and he could feel the heat of flames, the whisper of anger but the shout of betrayal, the scream of fear.

He could feel a lump in his throat, the beginning of stinging in his eyes.

He wanted to call Phil. He needed to call someone.

He wanted to go home.

“-Ommy? Tommy!”

There was a hand pulling on his arm, stopping him and he flinched whirling around to face Ranboo. His chest was heaving and he knew his eyes were frantic, but the familiar image of his friend was just enough for him to get an inch of grip on the present.

People moved around them, lost in their own worlds, and Tommy in his. But he wasn't alone in it, Ranboo stood there too, looking down at him with a small smile.

Tommy opened his mouth, ready to break,

“We have to fucking go, please I need to leave. I need to get help,”

But he couldn't speak, not when Ranboo was smiling down at him. Not when Tubbo was stumbling up to them, cup and snacks in his hands as he was smiling genuinely for the first time in what felt like years.

"Hey big man! You done and ready to party?" He shouted over the music, shoulder bumping into Ranboo as he settled with them.

He reached out, a few gummies and M&M's that had stained his hand offered to Tommy.

"Oh shit!" Tubbo laughed. Tommy grabbed all of what was in his hand, shoving it in his mouth in hopes to douse out anything he could say that would ruin the mood. He needed to get his shit together, and he wasn't going to ruin his friend's night because of it.

His face scrunched as they hit his tongue, turning his head and spitting it out on the ground almost instantly.

"Gross dude," Tubbo said.

"You good?" Ranboo asked, hand resting hesitantly but comfortingly on Tommy's shoulder.

Tommy looked up, wiping the spit from his mouth. He'd spend this time with his friend's, he'd get out of his own head and have a good damn time, and then he was going to face the people waiting at the house- at their home, and he was going to tell them everything.

Ask for help.

And he'd face whatever consequences that would arise because of it.

"They taste like shit," He said, relaxing and looking up at them. "Now what do you guys want to do that doesn't involve god awful food?"

Tubbo grumbled, complaining about having to grab more from the kitchen, and Ranboo looked mildly amused at the whole thing.

"Tubbo was playing beer pong, but there is karaoke on the other side of the house that would be fun," Ranboo explained over the music.

Tommy looked over at Tubbo who was leaning on Ranboo, staring into the crowd at something or another. He snapped into attention when he felt Tommy's eyes on him though, smiling at him with warmth radiating from him.

"I lost! Can you believe that shit?"

"You lost *three* games." Ranboo corrected.

Tommy snorted. "You got your ass kicked."

Tubbo waved it off, "I would've won if they let me play another round."

"You tried to cheat." Ranboo added.

Tubbo pushed Ranboo over with a laugh. “Lies and slander, you’re being a *bitch*,”

“How do you even cheat at beer pong?” Tommy asked, watching fondly as the two of them kept pushing into each other.

Tubbo smiled up at him deviously. “I can show you.”

Tommy would stand to the side of the game, playing a game of footsie with Ranboo as Tubbo lost yet again. He would try and hide his discomfort at the smell of alcohol and smoke, chatting about whatever he could think of with his friend and cheering Tubbo on.

When Tubbo climbed up over the table after a particularly bad loss, scaring the poor college student who’d dared to play against him, they moved to another area of the house.

—

No matter how hard he tried focusing on his friends or losing himself in the thrum of the house, he couldn’t stop the itch to reach towards his phone. He’d rehearsed his apology and played out what he could say to Wil over and over again.

But it wasn’t helping, and he couldn’t think straight with the vast amount of sensory overload that was filing his senses constantly. His attention kept flickering from Tubbo and Ranboo, to the guilt heavy in his lungs. After a particularly long period of imagining all the various ways his apology could end in his own demise, he realized he had to do something and fast.

He eyed Ranboo who was leaning against the couch next to him, eyes set ahead at where Tubbo was.

Tubbo who looked far too invested in whatever song he was singing in front of the tv. Lyrics were passing by but Tubbo didn’t seem to have to read them to know where he was in the song. So, he was just focused heavily on hitting the notes, eyes closed and slightly swaying to the tune. Whatever song he chose clashed horribly with the music in the rest of the house, and it was perfect.

Tommy felt warm just watching his friend, relieved that coming here hadn’t been the worst thing; not if it had Tubbo feeling better. It was a great moment, probably one they would talk about in the future, and Tommy had to make it better.

An idea popped into his head, and similar to the buzzed people around him, he had no impulse control.

“Oi Ranboo! Check this out,” Tommy shouted over Tubbo’s scattered singing, gesturing to his friend in front of the tv.

He didn’t even have to voice his plan before his friend was catching on that it was something—well, not so nice. Ranboo’s brows furrowed and he gave Tommy the best disapproving look he could. It didn’t work too well considering he was just a sixteen year old, and he just looked like a poor mimic of a parent.

“Tommy no.” Ranboo said, despite the smile bubbling in his voice. “Don’t you dare.”

The party shouldn't have had a karaoke set up, it was too good, too easy. At least that's what Tommy would blame it on. He squeezed his way through the people lingering around for their turn, coming up to the side of Tubbo.

His friend was lost in the song, none the wiser to Tommy's presence. So he stopped, not close enough to touch and alert Tubbo, but close enough to see his face in the chaotic lighting. There was still a certain heaviness around Tubbo's eyes, even now when he seemed lighter than he had been in weeks. It made Tommy falter in his plan, clammy hands no longer from excitement but from worry.

If only he knew. If only Tubbo would tell him. Maybe if Phil hadn't had come into the office when he did, Tommy would've heard what-

No.

This party wasn't the time for this. It was *supposed* to be fun.

Tommy wiped his palms on his jeans, used to the grip of the denim on his clammy skin by now. His heart was set on what he had to do, and he waited patiently for the right time, thoughts of everything outside this house pushed far down. Then it was time,

Just as Tubbo was belting a particularly long note, hitting it perfectly well for someone at a party might he add,

Tommy took one look at the mic, maybe it was with regret, or perhaps amusement, but it didn't matter. Because without much thought, he was pushing the end of it until the thing went right into Tubbo's mouth.

He pulled his hand back at the very *loud* choking sound reverberating in a room with people too drunk to understand what was going on. Even over Tubbo cursing and the party thrumming, he could hear Ranboo's wheezed laughing, and it was enough for him to crack a smile around a few laughs himself.

He would let Tubbo beat him with the mic after of course. But for now, at least his worries were a bit less pushed down.

—

"Are you going to drink that?" Tommy asked. He was staring questioningly at the cup in Ranboo's pale hand. His friend was staring down at it and the drink inside, face scrunched like he was thinking hard, harder than he did doing his math homework.

Tubbo had left to grab more snacks, promise of being back fading into the crowd like everything else seemed to do in this party. Moving areas in the house required holding desperately onto each other at this point lest they be lost to each other; more and more people seemed to arrive as time went on.

"Hm." Ranboo hummed. He pondered the drink for a moment more, before he was holding the cup out to Tommy in offering. "Did you want it?"

Tommy tensed as the cup entered his space, lips curling at the smell that hit his nose. He didn't even have to say anything before Ranboo was pulling it away. "I'm sorry." He rushed, apologetic in a way that wasn't warranted, but nice nonetheless.

"Fuck dude, it's fine don't apologize." Tommy waved it off, guilt tugging on him the longer he thought about the scent of the drink and how the people at home would react to it. "I just - I don't drink." His tongue was dry in his throat, but his words were true. Very little was stopping him from calling his foster brothers or Phil, if there was even a hint of something bad happening he might just snap. Alcohol always seemed to lead to something bad, at least in his case.

Ranboo hummed, luckily seeming to stop the conversation there. When he looked back down at his cup instead of Tommy, it was easier to breathe. Tommy watched as slowly, ever so slowly, Ranboo was tilting the cup to his lips; Eyes screwed shut as the liquid hit his tongue.

He pushed down any hint of dread he had.

"Ew, oh god." Ranboo pulled it back immediately, disgust radiating off of him. "I see why."

Tommy couldn't help but laugh, somewhat relieved. "Maybe you shouldn't have chosen straight vodka without a chaser." He said, silently thanking whoever would listen above he wouldn't have to be holding Ranboo's hair back as he threw up anytime soon.

Ranboo looked at him, perplexed.

"This is vodka?"

Tommy laughed harder, prying the cup away from Ranboo and tossing it in the overflowing trash next to them. "Oh man, let's just get some fucking soda."

—

Tommy had his coke, bubbling in his cup and braced on the counter as he watched his friends. Every now and then he'd brush against the phone in his pocket, something like longing pushing against him before he'd take another sip.

He knew he had to tell Wilbur what Dream had told him, sooner rather than later. He would deal with any anger or consequences sent his way. Then, he was going to head straight to Techno and figure out what the fuck was up with Dream. He'd promised Techno he would let him know if he needed help, and damn was he in deep at this point.

He'd been ignoring the fact that this might bring his record to light, but if he thought too hard about that he might jump off the nearest bridge. 'Ignoring' his problems at this party, and biding his time until he could properly talk to the brothers would have to do.

While he nursed his drink, deep in thought, Tubbo had something that was very much not just soda in his hand. A concoction of about five different sodas and cheap vodka- Tommy had tried to take it from him before he could pour any, but it had quickly devolved into a struggle. Tubbo seemed buzzed enough as is, and he didn't think he needed anymore.

Ranboo had barely caught the bottle before it shattered all over the floor. Tommy figured it was too much work then, and let Ranboo take over from there. Either way he watched them try and come up with a good mix. Having nothing better to do while the karaoke mic was out of commission do to copious amounts spit.

Before Tommy could think too hard about anything, Tubbo was drawing his attention with a clear of his throat.

“I call this, Tubbo and Ranboo’s masterpiece.” He said with a flourish, handing Ranboo the other cup he’d just topped off with mountain dew.

Tommy frowned at the red solo cup like it had personally offended him. “Just call it carbonated crack, the caffeine in there is going to hit you harder than the alcohol,” He rolled his eyes at both of them.

“Oh shut it, It’s about the taste,” Tubbo quipped, pulling the drink to his chest like he could protect it. “You wouldn’t understand.”

Tommy’s lip curled. “What taste? It’s gonna *taste* like shit-“

Tubbo gasped in mock offense, a bit of the drink spilling onto his hoodie as he moved away from Tommy. “Ranboo, are you hearing him insult our baby?”

His voice was a bit louder than usual, and not because of the music. Tommy figured it was the effects of whatever he’d consumed earlier slowly easing it’s airy buzz in.

“What?” Ranboo asked, pulled away from his attention on the cup to look up at them. His own buzz from the drinks he’d had was making him a bit more spacy than usual. “Our what?” His syllables were drawn out a bit, and Tommy reckoned he was more sensitive to drink than Tubbo.

“Congrats.” Tommy said dryly, making note to try and keep track of what Ranboo was consuming. “You missed it, you’re now married and with child.”

Ranboo blinked at him slowly, processing. The action was not unfamiliar on him, but thinking seemed to genuinely be a struggle. It was worrying to say the least, and something in Tommy’s stomach dropped at just how different his friend seemed after just a while of looking away. “Oh, okay.” Ranboo said finally, then he hesitated and Tommy had to hide the way his solo cup crumpled under his grip. “Wait... What?”

He’d left to the bathroom earlier when the other two were still experimenting with their concoction, and that must’ve been when Ranboo had more to drink. Tommy cursed his shit bladder for stopping him from being the responsible one.

Tubbo didn’t seem to notice anything off, having been in his own world for the past hour or so. He was already knocking his cup into Ranboo’s, no sign of worry on his face. “Cheers!” He shouted before taking a swig.

Tommy watched them both drink it, faces twisting with varying degrees of intensity. He was torn from being amused and worried, stuck on Ranboo's face to see any obvious changes. How many shots of vodka had they poured into those cups exactly?

He cleared his throat, "What was that about it being a masterpiece?"

They both grimaced, which hopefully meant the drinks weren't going to be finished.

"Shut up." Tubbo snapped, looking gloomy about it, but still taking another drink.

"Well, the aftertaste kind of tastes good?" Ranboo tried. "Maybe it needs—"

Tubbo jumped in before he could finish. "Chocolate syrup."

Tommy paled. "No."

—

Tubbo squirmed from Ranboo's arms, shouting obscenities that couldn't be heard over the heartbeat of the party. Ranboo himself, was stumbling, having lost coordination an hour ago. His arms remained firm around Tubbo though, no matter how hard Tubbo kicked, or how much Tommy said.

Tommy was beyond worried, he knew Ranboo was not in the right headspace. He'd gotten alcohol spilled all over his fucking hoodie when he'd tried to pry away Ranboo's last cup. He'd turned into a glorified babysitter, with Ranboo looking seconds away from passing out, and Tubbo far too easily distracted and running off.

"Tommy the door!" Ranboo slurred, kicking at the closed bathroom door like it would miraculously open. He was more animated than he had been earlier which was a relief.

"Put me down you fucking—" Tommy swerved around Tubbo's flailing limbs, Ranboo swaying with the fight of it.

It was easier to go along with whatever was happening than to fight it, the giant foul stain on his hoodie was proof of that. So he reached for the doorknob and ignored his screaming friends, surprised as it swung open.

Until he saw what was inside.

He could barely even choke out an apology, face flushed and hand shaking as he slammed the door shut again. He blinked at the blank door, voices fading back in as he burned under embarrassment and disgust.

"It's occupied," He said to his still fighting friends.

"What do you mean- Tubbo stop!" Ranboo practically threw Tubbo as he hoisted him up to get a better hold, ignoring the screeching. "Open the door!"

"I can't, it's occupie—"

Tommy's voice fell flat as he watched Ranboo charge forward and open the door himself, Tubbo still flailing from his shoulder. Tubbo screamed at the sight, Ranboo looming tall in the doorway and luckily blocking Tommy's view. Ranboo didn't seem to care though, pushing his way inside past the couple and dragging Tubbo with him.

"Get out this is- this is our bathroom now!" Ranboo slurred.

God they needed to go home, but it was 2am and they had two hours until Dream would give them a ride back. Which was unfortunate but also gave Tommy time to sober them up.

For now he watched in awe as the disgruntled couple left, cursing as they pushed past him. Ranboo was being a lot more bold that was for sure. He didn't exactly know what Ranboo's drink brain was doing, but at least he wasn't still drinking.

"Tommy!" There was a fist in his hoodie, and before he could think he was being pulled into the bathroom.

The door shut behind him, and soon he was face to face with a flushed Ranboo and a pissed looking Tubbo. Yeah, they were both wasted, and he was the only sober one left.

He swallowed. "Ranboo, why-"

"We're having-" He stuttered, face flushed in annoyance or alcohol. "This is an- an intervention!"

"What the fuck-" Tubbo didn't even get to finish before Ranboo was whirling on him. Tommy wished Ranboo wasn't an emotional drunk, he could barely keep up.

"What's *wrong* with you," Ranboo accused, so unlike his usual self it even threw Tubbo off.

"Woah," Tommy threw his hands up, grabbing at his swaying friend. This was going to spiral and he couldn't help his nervous laughter. "That's a loaded question dude-"

"He's all weird," Ranboo protested, pushing Tommy away. "What's wrong? He won't say anything so screw it! We're having an intervention."

Tommy could practically feel when something in the room shifted to a seriousness anyone who was drunk

should never touch. No one in the damn room, including him, was in the right mind for this conversation.

Tubbo threw his head back and laughed, loud and boisterous and bordered on manic. "Like you don't already know! Like everyone doesn't already know!"

Tommy felt his brow furrow in confusion. He could tell this conversation was going to go wrong, but he had to pry his mind away from intrigue.

He had to stop this, but before he could speak Ranboo was interrupting.

“Know what?” He nearly pleaded, anger and something else in his throat. “You won’t tell us anything!”

He’d *never* heard Ranboo shout like that.

Tommy took an instinctive step back, quickly losing grasp on the situation. His two very drunk, very emotional friends were spiraling quickly out of control. He wasn’t good with yelling, especially yelling from people who’d never done it before.

“Because I don’t want to fucking talk about it!” Tubbo snapped, slurring his words and swaying as he spoke. He’d gone from amusement to anger within a second, and it was terrifying. “Why are you always fucking asking!”

Ranboo turned more red than the alcohol had made him, leaning forward to get in Tubbo’s face. Tommy wanted to pull him back, but he couldn’t. “God forbid we care about you!”

“Ranboo,” He warned, grabbing his friend’s sleeve with fear pounding in his heart. Ranboo wouldn’t hurt him, but it didn’t change the fact that he was a 6’6 drunk and angry kid.

Tubbo didn’t seem to care though. He smiled and there was no amusement in it. Just pain. “So I can’t even have *one* night? Not even one night where I can have fun without thinking about it?!” He shouted, and Tommy was thankful no one would be able to hear it over the music.

He wanted to cover his ears, beg for them to stop fighting but his mouth remained shut. Even as Ranboo looked genuinely hurt.

“Guys.” He said, almost too quiet. His voice was shaking and he was cursing himself out for being such a pussy. “Can we not do this here? You’re both fucked up right now.”

Neither of them listened to him.

“We’re just trying to help you Tubbo. And you’re pushing us away and being an-“ Ranboo paused, looking like he was struggling with words. “An asshole!”

The unfamiliar curse coming from Ranboo’s mouth had Tommy’s stomach twisting. They wouldn’t get physical right?

Wrong.

Before he could stop it Tubbo was shoving Ranboo with force that was not at all friendly, pushing him back into the shower. He would’ve tumbled completely if Tommy hadn’t caught him, pulling him from his fall. He struggled for a second, half because he was freaking and half because Ranboo was pushing against him.

His heart was in his throat, and soon enough a familiar buzzing of anger joined it. Ranboo was so uncoordinated it was terrifying, but he was clawing against Tommy’s hold like he wanted to retaliate.

He was not going to watch his two best friends hurt each other.

“Tubbo!” He shouted, glaring at his friend who

seemed so much more fucked up than seconds earlier. “What the fuck are you doing?”

Tubbo was breathing heavily, but it was a long and drawn out thing. Leaned against the door with eyes barely cracked open, but alight with anger.

His friend bared his teeth, and he’d never seen him look so mad. Like a completely different person. “Get off my ass.” He said, cruelty laced in the words. “You’re *just* like everyone fucking else! I’m *fine*.” He looked ready to lunge.

Tommy lost his grip on Ranboo, who shot forward far too fast for someone under the influence. His hands fisted in Tubbo’s shirt and he was dragging him forward until he was on his tiptoes.

“You’re fine?” Ranboo growled, not an ounce of the timid and anxiety ridden boy left. “Really?”

Tommy was pulling at Ranboo’s back to no avail, ashamed that he was scared to step between them, to pull hard enough and risk hurting one of them. Of them hurting him.

“Stop.” He said, firm despite the shaking in his voice. “You guys are being fucking stupid.”

Ranboo didn’t even look back as his hand shot out, pushing Tommy back with too much force. His breath caught in his throat as he slammed back, fists clenched like they could contain fire.

“Let me go.” Tubbo snarled.

“Admit it.” Ranboo shot back, grip tightening. “Look me in the eyes and tell me you’re *fine*.”

Tommy couldn’t move from his place against the wall, frozen with anxiety far too intense for his lungs to keep up.

Tubbo was clawing into Ranboo’s grasp, pushing back with a look that could kill. “I’m fucking fine.”

Ranboo laughed, dark and disappointed and it had Tommy’s stomach twisting. “Then explain the fucking *pills* in your backpack.”

Tommy froze, brain completely halting. Ranboo and Tubbo stood face to face, only the sound of their breathing filling the silence. Tommy could barely process it.

Pills?

How much was he going to learn this night?

His breathing picked up, putting pieces together to a picture he had no clue was there. Ranboo hadn’t told him about any pills. He’d been keeping up with the fight until he wasn’t,

lost somewhere in a place neither of his friends had bothered to take him too.

“What pills?” Tommy asked, throat suddenly dry and fear flooding his tone. “Tubbo what fucking pills?”

All he could think of was the gardening club, of Dream who’d turn into a completely different person when he wasn’t sober.

Tubbo wouldn’t.

Would he?

Tubbo didn’t react, face gone blank. This only seemed to piss Ranboo off further. His grip tightening as he shoved at Tubbo.

“The ones he’s been taking since he started acting different!”

The air seemed to shift then, Tubbo coming to life like a live wire of rage.

He pushed Ranboo back then, anger practically radiating off of him. “They’re prescribed asshole! It’s for anxiety.” He laughed then. “What’d you think I was fucking carrying pills around to pop?”

Ranboo only faltered for a second. “Well how the hell would we know? It’s not like you tell us *anything* .” It was the most cruel Ranboo ever sounded.

Tommy could tell things were bubbling, that fire was rising, but he couldn’t get himself to move. He was frozen, terrified he was losing both of his friends in one night. Pushed as far away from them as he could be, he’d never heard either of them shout like that. He didn’t know where things had gone so wrong.

“What the fuck am I supposed to say?” Tubbo asked. “I can’t do anything without thinking too much, without my anxiety fucking controlling everything! I can’t even go to school without taking my meds anymore and I just want some peace, because this happens every time and I’m just-“ Tears were gathering in his eyes now, like his anger had reached a ceiling and couldn’t push any further. “I’m so *fucking* tired.”

And then Tommy was reaching his breaking point, tired of the night, of all the things he hadn’t seen, he didn’t know. This was the gasoline to his flame. He wanted to go home, he wanted to be back on that couch, back with the brothers.

He did not want to watch his two best friends hurt each other. This was supposed to be fun.

Ranboo’s mouth opened to retort but finally Tommy cut him off, voice filled with restrained anger as he spoke.

“Stop, just fucking stop.” They both looked at him, like they’d just remembered he was there. He was trying to steady his breathing, shaking hands as he tried to think about what to do. “We’re getting fresh air,” he said firmly.

He didn't trust himself or them.

They tried to argue, but his anger fueled him as he ripped them apart, scowl on his face. He found strength in his fire, letting it dance along his skin as he shouted back at Ranboo who'd tried to protest.

He was done with this shit.

And drunk or not, they seemed to notice, or at least decided that they wouldn't win against him.

Tommy lost himself to time travel as he walked them out, brain too heavy to focus on anything anymore. He missed the look of fear and regret finally crossing Ranboo's face, the few shots Tubbo was able to sneak as he boiled over, the eyes of someone else on him.

He just couldn't tonight.

—

Tommy hummed quietly in the chill air, disrupting the chirping of crickets and the soft mutterings of Ranboo in the grass. He'd left his two friends laying in the field, the park next to the house was empty aside from them.

His humming was the only thing keeping him from falling apart. His grip on the phone the only thing keeping him present. He had to wait until his friends sobered up, until they could talk this all through. But he was shaking with anger, anger that was shielding him from everything else.

He was worried. Terrified. He didn't know what to do, but he knew he had to do it.

Seeing the tears in Tubbo's eyes had been painful. He didn't know what was going on exactly, he was in over his head with all this. He didn't know what to make of the pills, of Ranboo and Tubbo who clearly had something else going on.

He couldn't do this anymore, be this person anymore.

He was sitting here outside a party he'd never wanted to go to. He'd enabled all this to happen, and landed himself in this position. He was in a web of his own weaving, all because of the one night he'd dropped a glass in a foster home he should've run from.

Or maybe it had started before then; when he'd just stood and watched as the girl he'd claimed to love like a sister had her beautiful hair cut brutally from her head.

Maybe it was when she'd gone missing, when blood drops had painted the floor and he'd known deep down what'd happened. When he'd listened to *him* and cleaned it up with tears and bile in his mouth instead of running.

Maybe it'd all started when the one person who'd brought him into this world, who was supposed to love him, looked at him and decided killing herself was better than raising someone like him.

The phone shook in his hand, Wilbur's contact open, apology and pleading dripping off his tongue.

They were all he had and he wanted, he longed to be part of their family so much it hurt him. It burned more than fire; more than the anger and hurt that'd stuck with him since he found his mom hanging.

Maybe he'd led himself up to this point, all his decisions culminating into this moment. A moment that bred dread so powerful it silenced him.

But he had a choice now. He had someone to call. People he didn't have to push away.

A choice where he could actually do something instead of standing frozen in his own fear. He didn't have to hurt others.

He'd do this. They'd given him the opportunity, and now he'd finally take the first step. He didn't have to push them away anymore.

His finger hovered over the call button, taking a steadying breath as he made his decision.

But he wouldn't get to call. Ranboo's shouting stopped him from closing the last inch.

"Tommy!" He shouted with a sense of urgency that had Tommy practically jogging over to where he left them. Phone shoved back in his pocket.

Ranboo's hands were on Tubbo's side, eyes staring up at Tommy with a look that had his blood running cold. Tommy's heart dropped before Ranboo even said the words,

"Tommy." Ranboo said with a shaky voice. "He's not waking up."

Chapter End Notes

I want to fucking die. I just want to fucking die. I write these stupid authors notes for myself, so I can look back and remember things. See where I was. Well, future self, if you even get to read this. I hope you know he was right, and I hope reading this is the last fucking thing you do.

Chapter 12

Hello! It has been a long time since I've used this account. I just wanted to give an update instead of leaving things in limbo. I don't know if anyone is still following this story, but oh well.

Disclaimer, I haven't written anything in two years and this isn't going to be proofread or anything, so it may be very rough.

To be as concise as possible, I no longer see myself finishing this fic. Not only am I no longer in the fandom, but due to the many actions of the creators the fandom spawned from, I don't feel comfortable using their names anymore. While in this story, the characters were based off their dsmp characters, because of recent events (and past events) the whole thing has simply soured in my head. If anyone is still interested in this story I could leave my notes and perhaps a rough outline of the ending upon request.

I regret a majority of the works on my ao3 account, but I am a firm believer of archiving things which is the purpose of this site. Regarding this fic I would've done some stuff differently, such as handling the subjects in it with more care. I also recognize I was in a terrible place writing the majority of my works, and my author notes reflected it greatly. Frankly, and honestly after escaping the situation I was in and having some time to heal, I could not stand to open my ao3 account for a while, because I was so embarrassed. Now though? I can. To finish covering my bases, I am okay, or as okay as I can be considering the state of the world right now lmao (did ya'll see that inauguration? crazyyy). But I am alive and here. Thank you to anyone who was concerned, and also I am sorry. I should not have been treating ao3 as a personal diary, but alas I was young, stupid, and mentally ill.

A lot has changed, and as much as I cringe (deeply very deeply), or regret when I look back at this account I can't in good faith fully write it off, nor delete this work. I have read fics before and been devastated to find the author has deleted the work or nuked their account. So I will keep my works and this account up.

Having said that; I am so grateful to anyone who ever left a kudos, a comment, a hit, a click, or even a glance at this work, or any on my account. This fic was a lifeline for me; a distraction from life. I met some wonderful people from this fandom. I was so happy to see people engaging in something I made, and I loved to engage with others. I have read every single comment on this work more than once. They are all so incredibly dear to me. It was so precious opening my email and seeing a comment, or a kudos being left. Seeing the same people comment on chapters as they came out, or as they read. Seeing you guys theorize or react, it meant the world to me. This fandom may leave a bad taste in my mouth but this small community could never. Interacting with you guys will always have been a positive experience for me, no matter what things the creators have done. It was so lovely to share this space with you all.

I wish I had the ability to fully express on this page just how much this all meant, and still means to me. All I can say is thank you,

I am endlessly grateful.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!